Campione! Volume 5

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 5".

丈月城
Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

剣の巫女

Campione V

「もちろん誓うわ！世界が滅ぶその日まであなたの隣にいると、わたしの全てを懸けて！」

エリカに迫る危機！神殺しは少女を救えるのか!? 大人気新神話第5弾!!

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た 9-5

カンピオーネ！ V 剣の巫女

丈月 城

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集英社

ISBN978-4-08-630516-7

C0193 ¥600E

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

世界に七人しか存在しない魔王（カンピオーネ）・草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）が、来日したリリアナの過剰な世話焼きに困惑していた頃、日本初の王に、イタリアの魔術師が侍（はべ）ることに危機感を覚えた者たちがいた。彼女たちを排除するべく遣わされた、新たな媛巫女（ひめみこ）・清秋院恵那（せいしゅういんえな）は、祐理（ゆり）と護堂の仲を進展させようとする一方、天叢雲剣（あまのむらくものつるぎ）を振るい、エリカに戦いを挑むが!?

11月の新刊・好評発売中！

丈月 城 イラスト／シコルスキー カンピオーネ！ V 剣の巫女

松 智洋 イラスト／ぺこ 迷い猫オーバーラン！7 拾ったらいいじゃないですか！

八薙玉造 イラスト／植田 亮 神剣アオイ NEW

本田 透 イラスト／大田優一 円卓生徒会12

新城カズマ イラスト／箸井地図 15×24 link four Riders of the Mark City

丈月城
Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！
剣の巫女
Campione V

た 9-5

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9784086305167

1920193006001

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C0193 ¥600E

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Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月（たけづき） 城（じょう）

友人と最近、
いま面白いのは『湯けむりスナイパー』と
『ホワイトアルバム二期』だという話題で
熱く語り合いました。
ウイッス。

シコルスキー

そろそろプロフィールに生年を書きたくなくなってきた
神奈川在住のイラストレーター。
S57生まれ。
部屋の天井に届くまで本を並べて
地震に怯えつつお仕事しております。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！ 神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！ Ⅱ 魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！ Ⅲ はじまりの物語
カンピオーネ！ Ⅳ 英雄と王
カンピオーネ！ Ⅴ 剣の巫女

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙（くさなぎ）護堂（ごどう）

高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷（まりや）祐理（ゆり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール

《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

清秋院（せいしゅういん）恵那（えな）

当代随一とされる「太刀の媛巫女」。

沙耶宮（さやのみや）馨（かおる）

正史編纂委員会東京分室室長。

甘粕（あまかす）冬馬（とうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

草薙（くさなぎ）静花（しずか）

護堂の妹。祐理の茶道部の後輩。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

丈月城

Illustration
シコルスキー

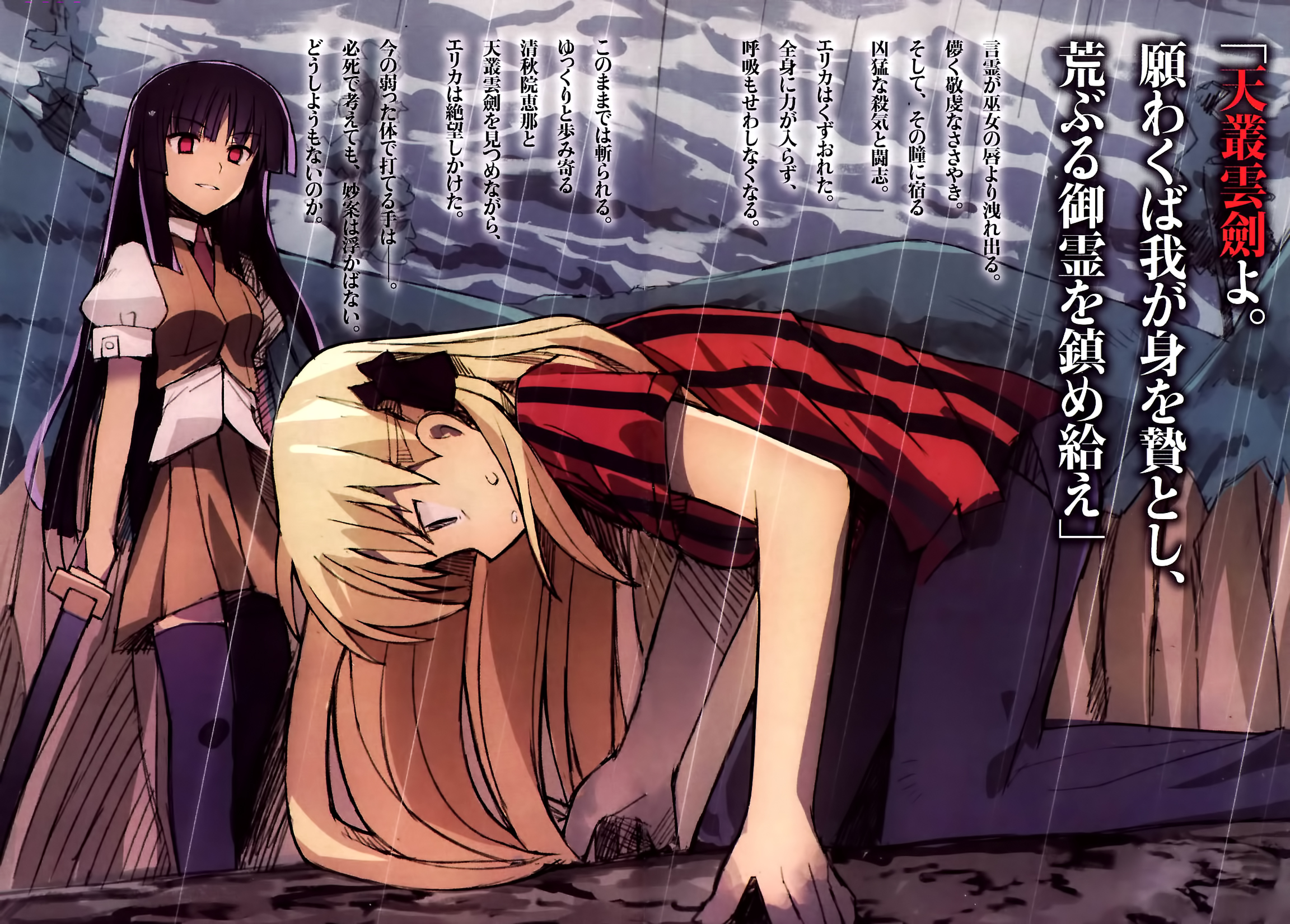
カンピオーネ!

剣の巫女

Campione V

静花
護堂
馨
恵那
祐理
エリカ
リリアナ
ャキソバ

「いずれ護堂の手で脱がせるはずのものよ？」
「どんなのがいいか言ってみて」



「天叢雲剣よ。
願わくば我が身を贄とし、
荒ぶる御霊を鎮め給え」

言霊が巫女の唇より洩れ出る。
儚く敬虔なささやき。
そして、その瞳に宿る
凶猛な殺気と闘志。

エリカはくずおれた。
全身に力が入らず、
呼吸もせわしなくなる。

このままでは斬られる。
ゆっくりと歩み寄る
清秋院恵那と
天叢雲剣を見つめながら、
エリカは絶望しかけた。

今の弱った体で打てる手は——。
必死で考えても、妙案は浮かばない。
どうしようもないのか。

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丈月 城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

Campione V

剣の巫女

■こんにちは！
挿絵担当のシコルスキーと申します。

今回はひさしぶり（？）のような気がする
日本編ということで
某騎士さんがせえらあ服姿で登場します。
うーん、制服が思ってた以上に映えますね。
あと、ついに念願の静香ピンの絵を描けて
幸せ！文月さんには私の趣味がバレている
ようで怖いデス（笑

ではでは、また次巻にて～。

Prologue

Erica Blandelli was a girl who stood out.

Her combination of reddish blond hair glittering like a crown, dazzling looks, perplexing volume showing a balanced sense of beauty, and the fact that she still is not even fully developed attracted attention wherever she went.

And she was a foreigner.

In this secluded island country, that was reason enough to attract stares.

Then again, in the neighborhood in Aoyama, there were far more foreigners than elsewhere. It was only a bit, but you could say that the usual causes of her radiance were less effective.

It was past ten at night. She was sitting in an open air cafe along the Aoyama Doori.[1]

Wearing leather pants that matches with her jersey, Erica was waiting for her appointment.

September had only just begun. If it were noon, she would be wearing sunglasses right about now. While showing off her 160-plus centimeter tall model-like body, Erica was idly spending her time.

"I am very sorry for making you wait, Erica-sama."

"You certainly did, Karen. Such a mistake is unlike you."

Erica elegantly gave her reply to the latecomer.

Karen Jankulovski.

She was the personal maid for Liliana Kranjcar, Erica's rival.

But right then she was not wearing her usual maid dress, but a camisole and a short-sleeved cardigan. She could well be on her way for a night out in town.

"I was caught by Liliana-sama on my way out. She wanted to know where I was going..."

"I assume you managed to put her in a box?”

"Without a hitch. We are talking about Liliana-sama here. You can say coaxing her is no more than child's play."

The women denouncing their old friend/rival and Mistress, respectively, exchanged malicious smiles.

The two women from Europe beautifully displayed what many Japanese would see as a well-acquainted relationship. In short, they were like two happily plotting villains.

"You're a bad girl, Karen. Very reliable."

"You're flattering me, but compared to you I still have a long way to go, Erica-sama... so then, this is the promised item."

Karen put a batch of copy-paper on the table.

The girl also known as [Diavolo Rosso] took it with graceful delicacy and checked its contents.

It was the latest edition of the literature that Liliana had been writing since a few years back.

It contained love stories, poems, and her occasional thoughts. Karen had stealthily copied them and Erica purchased them for a high price. These business transactions occurred exactly once a year.

"Oh Lily... this time you've become even more of a poetic maiden..."

"Ohh, but this is because she's experiencing the season of love for the first time in her life. There's nothing she can do about it... ohh, doesn't this topic cause you a bit of discomfort, Erica-sama? I am very sorry."

Erica just shrugged her shoulders to Karen's nonchalant statement.

It was not a pleasant topic, but she was neither honest nor careless enough to let it show on her face. She maintained a very elegant attitude, implying a subtle cynicism.

"I don't care about what you did in Naples anymore. I just won't show any more openings that will be taken advantage of... By the way, Karen, do you really think Lily has a chance of winning that certain person over from me? This is not a sword duel, you know?"

"That certainly is a pending problem, but, well, I am with her in this," Karen said, half admitting Erica's point. "What Liliana-sama lacks, the staff around her just has to make up for... And more importantly, you are extremely unfair in this regard, Erica-sama. Apart from your magical prowess and political strength boosted by your feminine wiles, you are also very intelligent. Couldn't you give us a handicap?"

"What do you want me to do about it? All of that is what makes me Erica Blandelli."

Erica calmly smiled at both the compliment and the complaint.

"Ahh, but if you're going to compliment me like that, please also praise Godou's good luck of meeting a woman like me. He has no idea, but he really is one blessed fellow!"

"Godou-sama, you say? ... Is it possible that that gentleman likes women who will make him spoil them?"

"I'm sure he doesn't hate them, why do you ask?"

"Nothing; Liliana-sama was so proactive and yet it didn't appear to leave a big impact on his emotions. So I thought, rather than proactive, assertive women, maybe a selfish woman who makes him spoil her... If he has reached that level at his young age already, I can see him become a considerable playboy in the near future," Karen said in deep thought. She was probably thinking about how Liliana was behaving lately.

Erica laughed silently and showed a victorious smile.

"No matter how proactive she is, if she says she does it 'as a knight~~,' that blockhead will take it at face value. If you put *those two* together for just a while, they might get better..."

"Ahh, are you talking about that Japanese miko[2] Right, speaking of miko..."

Suddenly Karen changed the topic.

"'Hime-Miko'[3]... just what kind of people are they? There was also that something-or-other-committee. The Japanese magic associations seem to be quite peculiar."

For a European magician, that impression was only natural.

Erica nodded. The associations the girls belonged to were " Copper Black Cross" and "Bronze Black Cross."

Both of these associations were based in Milan, Italy and were noteworthy on an international level.

At least one association existed in every current and historical major city, and they formed the world of magicians, different from the public society. That went without saying in Europe.

However, Japan had few magic associations.

Most of them were sects rooted in Buddhism, but they did not gather in the cities.

Magicians living in the cities did not create their own associations but were instead organized and regulated by a state-controlled group called "History Compilation Committee." And then there were the Hime-Mikos in question.

"Let's see. Yuri has gone to Europe a lot, so there are people who know about her, but... the truth is that her involvement in the group called 'Hime-Miko' isn't very well known. You see, apparently the 'Hime-Miko' are scouted from families having an amiable relationship with the History Compilation Committee and receive a special education to make the most of their spiritual powers."

There was not much information on Hime-Miko. Its membership was probably controlled by the History Compilation Committee.

Even with the power of an association like the "Copper Black Cross", details such as their numbers or what kind of spiritual power each one holds were unclear.

"Probably, the trick that brings forth new Hime-Miko lies in their lineage. I believe the Committee always keeps track of those families that easily produce people with exceptional spiritual powers; the Committee also observes and protects them so that their bloodlines don't die out. During that process, those with greater spiritual powers are selected as Hime-Miko... something like that."

It was easier for girls than boys to manifest special spiritual dispositions such as spirit vision.

In Europe, it was the same with those who held the qualities of a "witch". The point was, women had a higher chance of holding exceptional dispositions.

"You mean, there are people with special abilities like Yuri Mariya scattered all about?"

"It appears there aren't 'that' many, but at least a few. According to the information I have gotten hold of, Yuri Mariya seems to be very high-ranked even among Hime-Miko."

Erica certainly did not just played around during the three months she had been in Japan.

Although she could not skip school much due to Godou's nagging, as a knight serving a Campione, she had seen to various arrangements and investigations.

Putting the copy-paper she had come for into a bag, Erica stood up.

Karen bowed respectfully with a composed expression.

"Thanks as always. It really helps me out to have such a generous business partner."

"It's only natural to pay a proper price for such excellent commodities. Although I would gladly pay even more if important information about the [Bronze Black Cross] comes along with it."

"Your feelings alone are more than enough. I don't want to be purged as a traitor yet."

She would stop at the least possible danger, when it could still be settled as an amusing tale. That was what Karen wanted to say.

To her reasonable reply, Erica responded with a ladylike smile.

That was the type of the people with whom Erica liked to maintain long-term business relationships. After all, those who did not know their own limits could fail when others least expect it.

In that regard, Karen was Erica's ideal accomplice, for she would be able to supply Erica with her mistress's personal information for years to come.

"I see. Then, see you some other time. Ahh, if you have any other interesting information on Lily, I'll pay a lot for it as well."

"Understood. If I come upon such a thing, I will certainly contact you. Good night."

Sent off by Karen, Erica left her seat.

The night was long. There were still many things that she had to do.

In the end, it was nearly 3am when Erica was in the vicinity of her home again.

There were no strong magic associations in Tokyo. However, there *were* quite a few wizards.

After parting with Karen, Erica headed to a certain hotel and took part in an auction they held in a room there. It was a secret meeting where foci and grimoires were sold on a large scale.

Some items seemed like they would be confiscated right away if the History Compilation Committee were to find them.

Erica was participating because she hoped to obtain a rare fetish , and she wanted to make personal connections with magicians unrelated to the Committee.

There were no valuable goods so she did not buy anything, but her other goal went well.

This was another night where she had made her name and face known.

It had been three month since she came to Japan. Apart from being the genius magician who came from Italy, she was also the lover of a devil king, a Campione. By now, there were not many people 'in the business' in Tokyo who still did not know of her.

After getting out of the taxi, Erica walked up the short path to her mansion. The night had gotten late and there were no signs of life whatsoever.

Nevertheless, Erica stopped in her tracks, feeling an unpleasant presence.

Sixth sense... did not nail it. It was a smell mixed into the nightly air.

A faint smell of iron stimulated her nose. Immediately after she felt it, the attack came.

Cutting the air, a lump of iron came flying.

Swords.

The gently curving blades belonged to refined, old-style Japanese swords. However, there were no handles. The four swords were welded together at the base.

The curvature grew stronger as it traversed down the blade, forming something like a swastika symbol.[4] Although no one held the strange sword, it was floating in midair and continued to attack her while rotating at high speed.

Erica immediately jumped away and used magic to call forth her magic sword.

Cuore Di Leone.

The lion's magic sword had an elegant, slender blade and shone with a cool and clear silver radiance.

With it, Erica tried to knock down the swords flying in the air. However, her strike was returned by the swastika. The blades rotating like an electric fan sent Cuore Di Leone flying from its wielder's hands.

Erica had been disarmed.

The swastika sword attacked right away.

However, with a magnificent smile decorating her lips, Erica started reciting.

"Arges, Steropos, Brontes. Bestow thy blessing of lightning upon my sword!"

At that moment, Cuore Di Leone, which had been knocked high up into the air from her hands, gave off purple sparks.

There was a flash descending from the heavens.

The magic sword that held the name of the lion was draped in lightning as it swooped down and pierced the swastika from above.

This time it pierced the center, where the four blades were linked together, without being blown off.

The swastika was completely run through. Smashed to pieces, its blades fell to the ground.

"Its structure is too simple to be some kind of golem or gargoyle . So is this a 'Made in Japan' thing after all?"

While muttering, Erica pulled out a handkerchief.

With it, she picked up one of the smashed fragments and tucked it away. It appeared that a new danger was closing in on her—just what she wanted.

With her adventurous spirit stimulated, Erica walked the rest of the way to her home with a light skip in her steps.

Chapter 1 - Omen of a Storm

Part 1

When people spoke of shrines in Yushima in the Bunkyou ward, it was usually about Yushima Tenjin.[5]

There was also the famous Kanda Myoujin[6] nearby. But right now, she was not at such a major place. There was a quiet shrine in the backstreets of Yushima. Usually without a priest or a full-time miko, this little shrine was cared for by the neighborhood parishioners.

She opened the door to the cozy front shrine and stepped inside.

People from the vicinity who caught a glimpse of her might have thought it strange.

Because after throwing open the usually closed door, the female high-school student wearing a short-sleeved uniform began to roam around shamelessly. But since she was not breaking any laws, there was no reason to reprimand her.

Besides, it was five in the morning. There were almost no pedestrians passing by.

"I said I got it, grampsy. Yeah I'm fine, probably... ohh shut it. Well, I've never gone out with a boy before, but... And whose fault do you think that is?"

While sitting courtly in seiza[7] posture, she was talking fiercely on her cell phone.

Outside, strong winds were blowing violently.

The howling wind continued to rock the shrine as if it was one step short of blowing it away. The sky was covered by dark clouds and looked about to rain any time.

"Eh, how to seduce a man? ... If you're the one to teach me, it's not going to be of any use anyway, grampsy. You're behind the times at best, you know? I'll study by myself."

With one hand, the girl skillfully unfastened the package on the floor.

A long sword in a black lacquered scabbard appeared. It was her reliable partner, three shaku, three sun, five bu[8] long.

Right next to it, ten-odd sheets of paper were strewn about. It was an investigation report on two girls about her age.

"Leaving that aside, I've found an interesting girl... Yep, right, one of the king's lovers... Yeah, because I don't feel like losing. I'll chase her out of Japan for sure... Yes... Yes yes. Of course I'm ready to use force if it gets down to it. That way's more interesting. Okay, I'll contact you again."

After ending the conversation, the girl picked up one of the paper sheets.

Erica Blandelli. Native of Milan, Italy. Member of the Magic Association [Copper Black Cross], Age 16.

Height 165cm. BWH 87/58/88.

There was even a photo attached. It showed an incredibly beautiful girl.

She, Seishuuin Ena, was complacently smiling while looking at the [Diavolo Rosso]'s personal information.

"As an opponent she lacks nothing. This girl will surely allow you and Ena to have some fun."

While calling out to her partner lying on the floor, Ena was looking outside.

It had become completely silent.

The violent wind had weakened and the sun rays were piercing the clouds.

"So that wind was grampsy's fault after all... he's such a troublesome grandpa."

After shrugging her shoulders and murmuring, Ena was about to stuff her cell phone into her pocket when she remembered that it was completely discharged. Pausing midway, she started looking for the battery charger which should be in her bag.

The cell phone Seishuuin Ena had been talking over had had no power source.

Part 2

In Erica Blandelli's dictionary, there was no idiom like "Early to bed, early to rise."

Instead the opposite existed. She would stay up late at night and, unless there were other businesses, she would sleep until around noon.

That was the life-style Erica Blandelli loved.

But, this morning, she abruptly got up from her bed at 5am.

It was not like she wanted to enjoy an invigorating morning on a whim.

While rubbing her tired eyes, she picked up the cell phone near her pillow and dialed a number registered in her address book. The other party did not pick up, but she persistently continued.

"What ishh it, Eri—cca, ishh early in the moring. ... is there... aaaa..an emergency...or ssshhhing?"

At last, her lover, Kusanagi Godou, had picked up.

Probably he was not awake either. He was slurring his words.

Usually this was when she would present him with a graceful morning greeting and a kiss over the telephone. But right now Erica did not have the composure for that, so she cut straight to the point.

"Hey, Godou... today you don't need to come pick me up. I'll go to school at noon. It's regrettable that I won't be able to see your face when waking up, but that's how it is..." Erica said with a whisper that lacked the richness her voice usually had.

It was a faint voice, one that gave a very immature impression.

She was not a morning person; hence the only one who had the privilege to contact her under such dire circumstances was Kusanagi Godou.

"I don't remember our school having flextime."

"Flextime or not isn't the problem. The problem is that I'm unbearably tired this morning. I won't be able to welcome you like this even if you come. I'll probably be in bed the whole time... Ahh, if you like, you can spend the whole morning in bed with me...?"

Because she was weak in the morning, it was Godou's daily routine to come and pick her up for school.

But even though she called him out of concern over that, she still received a sharp reply in return.

"You know, even if we put the problem with flextime on hold, I don't understand this sudden call early in the morning with neither restraint nor prior arrangement... it wouldn't have happened if you had just used some common sense"

"Because... the two of us need neither restraint nor common sense between us. We have love."

"There are so many things I should say about that, but my head isn't working well yet... I'll tell you later at school. Don't skip."

"Then I'll tell you what I want to say right now. I love you, and, good night," Erica whispered gently and threw the cell phone away.

She stretched out on the bed again, closed her eyes, and returned to her country of sweet dreams right away.

Kusanagi Godou earnestly felt miserable. Waking up early in the morning had been the worst.

He had been struck awake by Erica's call at five 'o clock in the morning.

As a consequence of waking up half-way, he had lost the will to go to sleep again.

With the creed "early to bed, early to rise," Godou always got up right after 6am. So even if he got up at five, it was not that hard. But a normal human would not have called him that early in the morning.

He had hoped for Erica to treat people with more common sense.

He melancholically muttered to himself.

He was in Jounan Academy's year 1 class 5 before morning homeroom. However, in the seat next to him, Erica was nowhere to be seen. It seemed she would be late just like her advance notice said.

"Seriously, that girl..." As Godou sighed, the female student next to him started talking to him.

"I do not see Erica. Were you not together this morning?"

"She contacted me saying she'd be late because she's sleepy."

"That girl was saying such things again? She really has not changed since she was a little child! She is always so selfish and not even trying to stick to the rules..."

The angrily muttering girl had her silver hair collected in a ponytail.

Liliana Kranjcar. After leaving her hometown of Milan, the great knight came all the way to Tokyo for him. It was the result of him thoughtlessly consenting when she told him "she'd stay by his side as his knight."

Before he knew it, Liliana, who had arrived in Japan at the end of August, had decided to study abroad.

She got into year 1 class 5 of the private Jounan Academy, which was his class. During homeroom on the first day, she had suddenly made an announcement.

Even though she was an Italian exchange student, she introduced herself in flawless Japanese.

When told that her seat was along the windows, Liliana had frowned with a twitch.

And then she declared right after stalwartly walking up to Godou's seat:

"To begin, I should first explain: I, Liliana Kranjcar, have someone I have sworn to share my destiny with, to be close with at all times. It is this gentleman, Kusanagi Godou."

She had a magnificent tone of voice; her words spoken like performances from a classical Greek drama.

"What is she saying all of a sudden?"

When their classmates all made expressions that seemed to say that, Liliana had continued her address. That she, who could be called his knight, would constantly be waiting by his side.

"The place I should sit at cannot be anywhere other than by his side. I would like you to think about helping me with my mission and pardon my selfishness."

That appeal had surprised Godou.

No, she was being impossible. He had wanted to remonstrate her, but he was now at a loss for words.

Suddenly the surrounding students had gotten up from their seats and started changing seats to grant Liliana's firm request.

At that time Liliana must have used hypnotism or some kind of magic.

Just like that, she had secured the seat next to him, and the class had immediately recognized: On Kusanagi Godou's right sat Erica Blandelli, and on his left sat Liliana Kranjcar; the two beautiful girls who came from Europe surrounded Godou and competed for his attention.

Liliana was burning with helpfulness towards Godou. Erica nonchalantly interfered with that.

After that day, such spectacles would repeat themselves many times. But today, one of the two in question was absent. It seemed like he would finally be able to spend time calming his heart, so Godou was relieved.

"Kusanagi Godou. Your complexion is not what it should be. Do you lack sleep?"

"I did sleep well, but I woke up at an odd time. That may be why..."

When Liliana suddenly asked him, Godou opted to answer safely. He did not mention Erica's name out of a knight's compassion.

"Adequate sleep is the basis for a healthy life. Please also take care to maintaining your health," she told him with an overly serious expression. Since she certainly was right, he had nothing to refute.

When Godou nodded with a bitter smile, the silver-haired knight sighed.

"This is no laughing matter. Your lack of self-awareness as a king is an evident weakness of yours... however, there is nothing we can do about it today. I thought this might happen, so please have some of the coffee I prepared this morning."

With that said, Liliana pulled a thermos flask out of her bag.

'What preparedness!' Godou was a little surprised at the unexpected development.

"How much sugar and milk should I add?"

"Ah, please don't put any. Black is fine."

"That is bad for your stomach, I cannot recommend that way of drinking. Well, no helping it now, let us take it one step at a time."

"Ah, okay."

When he accepted the presented coffee, Liliana said without a moments delay:

"It is hot, so please take care. If you don't mind, should I cool it for you?"

"Y-you don't need to go that far...," he perplexedly replied to her , who was leaning forward to blow on the coffee. Ever since this new knight had precipitously joined him, she has always taken on a very polite demeanor.

Coming from a family built on the principle of laissez-faire,[9] Godou had never experienced being care for to this degree, not even during infancy.

Liliana scowled at his reserved reply with a stern face.

"This is also my duty as a knight. Feel free to order me as you like. You should become more used to making use of people... What is that! Take your shirt off right away! Quickly!"

"Eh? Why?"

Liliana, her face changing color, drew closer to the wincing Godou.

"Your shirt has become frayed. I need to sew it right away."

"Y-you can leave that much alone."

"It would be my shame if I allowed you to look like that."

In the end, Godou, overpowered by the girl's forcefulness, took his shirt off and handed it to her.

When he was in his t-shirt, he noticed the stares concentrating on him from the surroundings.

Everyone was observing them—while quietly whispering to each other, while giggling, or while smacking their lips in annoyance. They gave impressions like 'Get a room!' or 'Eeeek, filthy!' or 'Tsk. That damn Kusanagi... he should just die.'

It was as though they were looking at a pimp that did nothing but leech off women.

At that moment, when his dignity as a man was being doubted... Godou finally realized what was going on around him.

Then lunch break arrived.

While heading for the rooftop, Godou was assailed by anxiety.

If he continued onward like that, he could not help but feel that he would rush head-on into an even scarier minefield. But since he still had no excuse to escape...

The first to welcome him on the rooftop was Liliana.

"I have been waiting for you... However, since our destinations were the same, could you not have come here together with me?" she inquired in ill humor.

Under her dissatisfied expression Godou's body slightly cramped.

"So-sorry. I went to buy some bread."

"Is that so? That is unfortunate... finally a chance to be alone and progress our relationship..."

When Godou made a suitable excuse, Liliana mumbled away to herself.

"Eh?"

"Ah, nothing. As a knight. Right, because as a knight I must act as your guard. Anyways, let us quickly have lunch!"

While her mouth ran non-stop, Liliana produced a bundle from her bag that looked like a lunchbox.

With handmade sandwiches and fresh juice among other things , no one could object about either its taste or nutrition.

In contrast to the lunchboxes Erica brought, which were carefully prepared by Arianna, Liliana also began bringing handmade cooking every day. Usually they would share the gathered food with everyone, but...

This day Erica was absent. But everyone else still gathered.

Mariya Yuri was from the class next door and his little sister Shizuka especially came from the middle school section.

Would lunch really end safely with this lineup? As anxiety assailed Godou, Yuri timidly asked him a question.

"E-Erica-san is not present today?"

"Yeah, she said she'd come to school today but I guess she's not here yet."

"I... see...," Yuri murmured and fell silent, looking depressed. Then even Godou became restless.

Ever since the events in Naples, his relationship with her had become delicately awkward.

He felt that before the summer holidays, while being reserved around each other, they had become wonderfully close. However, lately it had always been like this, somewhat formal.

If at least Erica were here, she would liven up the place with her ingenious conversation skills.

It was time to do something. While looking at Yuri, who had been plunged into silence, Godou made up his mind. He might be over-thinking matters, but he would feel bad if the situation went on without him doing anything.

"You need not care about such a selfish woman. Leaving that aside, Kusanagi Godou, I warned you the other day, and yet you still obtained something like that again?" Liliana interjected in ill humor.

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"I am talking about that. About that obviously nutrient-deficient bread!"

She was staring at the yakisoba bread[10] that Godou bought.

Even among the bread in the store, it was particularly a popular article. The sweetness and saltiness of the sauce surrounding the noodles was exquisite, and it was always sold out a few minutes after the beginning of lunch break.

That day he had managed to buy two of those popular items. He also purchased an egg sandwich and a croquette sandwich along with them, but in terms of rarity they were no match for the yakisoba bread.

But apparently the knight from Milan disliked this specialty bread that was unique to Japan.

"Combining carbohydrates with carbohydrates is reckless at best. So long as my heart beats, I shall not permit that kind of crude meal."

And just like that, Liliana confiscated the yakisoba bread. In return, she forced a self-made sandwich onto him.

Roast beef and lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, avocados, and other ingredients held between toasted rye bread, seasoned with what appeared to be a handmade sauce.

"A meal like this is appropriate for a warrior. Now, please eat up."

"A-ahh. Then, thanks..."

Actually, that day he had wanted to be satisfied by the taste of junk food sauce.

But refusing Liliana's consideration with such a reason would feel awkward.

Godou bit into the sandwich. Of course, it was delicious. It tasted better than the food offered by the cafes in the area. The pickled vegetables that were offered along with the sandwich were outstanding as well.

It was not just garnished with the customary cucumber, but carrots and broccoli as well. When he asked, he learned that they were also self-made.

It was a lunch prepared with a lot of time and effort that left nothing to be desired in both taste and nutrition.

However, Godou unintentionally stared at the yakisoba bread, which had been regretfully confiscated.

"Hey, could you return that to me? I still have room for more..." he asked tentatively. Junk food with an excess of salt and sauce had a charm that was hard to resist, after all. As a former athlete, he normally showed self-restraint; but from time to time gluttony would overcome him.

"I-I cannot. This was hard, but I confiscated it under consideration of your own good, you know?"

Liliana somehow became flustered when Godou asked.

"E-even if you ask me with such a face, this is out of the question, simply out of the question... But, umm, it is not that I cannot consent to giving you half of it. S-split half of it with me. That would be fine."

"Liliana-san. Please don't change your position so abruptly~" Shizuka said to Liliana as she suddenly came around to agreeing.

Until now, she had been sarcastically watching the exchange between her brother and the silver-haired knight.

"It's shameful to be like a mother going all soft on her child just because he's throwing a tantrum."

She was not outright rude, but Shizuka's tone contained an obvious thorn. Minding that, Yuri, who sat across her, softly chided her.

"Shizuka-san, you must not speak like that. Well, I also think that Liliana's behavior is inconsistent, but..."

"C-could you stop with the strange accusations?"

Liliana cleared her throat with a somewhat sheepish expression.

"Shizuka-san, I only acted with appropriate concern towards your older brother. In addition, I presented a compromise to meet his wishes as much as possible. Therefore, Mariya Yuri, all my actions were taken thinking of Kusanagi Godou's well-being. In that sense, all of my actions are consistent, I believe."

She was stiffer towards the younger Shizuka than towards Yuri, who was her age.

Liliana made her arguments with that slight difference in attitude.

"In short, that means you've totally caved in against my brother, right?"

"I caved in against Kusanagi Godou? Ridiculous. I am always strict and push high standards onto him. What you said just now was clearly a mistake of the facts," Liliana said as she took out a napkin.

When she suddenly handed it to him, Godou was startled.

"Ahh, this is no good. You have gotten sauce on you. Your dignity and authority will be for naught like this. Okay, it is all right now. You are an unexpectedly troublesome person, hmm?" she said while wiping Godou's mouth.

Although she called him troublesome, Liliana still looked very content for some reason. It was a strange feeling of enrichment, and, from the looks of it, Yuri and Shizuka had awfully cold stares.

"Godou-san."

"Onii-chan, I can't believe it. You look like an idiot. You're totally being babied!"

Were these possibly the same reactions that had occurred earlier in the classroom? Exposed to stares that doubted his character and dignity, Godou was horrified.

By the way, Liliana and Shizuka had met for the first time on the last day of the summer holidays.

Saying that her personal arrangements in Italy had finished at last, Liliana had appeared in Nezu[11] in the Bunkyou ward and went straight to Godou's house to introduce herself.

At that time, both Godou and Shizuka had been at home, and so was their grandfather Ichirou.

He had instructed her not to reveal information on magicians, knights, or Campione to his family, so Liliana had not used those words.

Still. *Still.*

"I came to take care of Kusanagi Godou" or "we shall be together forever."

"Our relationship binds us with the same fate; we are one in body and soul" or "I intend to protect him for all our lives" were also unnecessary, Godou believed.

At that time, his grandfather had laughed "Hoho, well well" and gave Liliana a warm reception.

But after she had gone home, he had whispered: "You see, girls like that brood over too many things, so you need to be careful with them. How should I say it; whether they let you live or die is up to you..."

That piece of advice somehow seemed weighed down with meaning. And speaking of Shizuka...

"When you vanished off somewhere at the start of the summer holidays, I can't believe you were out catching such a beautiful person! You weren't satisfied with just Erica-san and Mariya-san; no, you had to get a third one!?! Onii-chan, you're totally like grandpa!"

Just like that, she had become exceedingly hotheaded. 'Little sister of mine, don't have weird misunderstandings about your brother.' But when he tried to relay that to her, Liliana had objected first.

"Shizuka-san, your words just now are mistaken. Unlike Erica or Mariya Yuri, I do not intend to become your brother's lover. Liliana Kranjcar is a knight that will protect Kusanagi Godou until the end, living my life alongside him... that is the purpose of my existence."

"L-lover!?"

"Liliana-san, please stop using such strange words!"

As Yuri interjected, Shizuka also winced at the term, one not usually used by modern middle and high school students.

But Liliana's face remained calm.

"Am I wrong, Mariya Yuri? I have already recognized that as what you are waiting for."

"That is not true! That very idea is a misunderstanding!"

"I see... Well then, if you say you have no ambition to become his lover, please refrain from excessive meddling. As it is my duty, I shall earnestly remain in waiting by Kusanagi Godou's side. I would like you to not interfere."

Faced with Liliana's decisive words, Yuri became flustered.

While Godou grew worried as he listened next to her.

If the usually reserved Japanese miko and the dutiful Milanese knight continued to diverge like that, it would definitely leave a bad aftertaste. He should settle matters before it came to that.

"Hey, Liliana, don't be so stiff. Mariya only says that because she's worried about us. It's nothing to be so hard on her for."

Matters like these should be resolved before they take deep roots.

Maybe it was because he had been the captain when he was still playing baseball, but Godou had gotten used to this sort of problem. It was not necessary to be excessively friendly among teammates, but discord hidden in the shadows was not good.

Especially if a girl like Yuri was involved, he wanted to be considerate.

"Godou-san..."

"I'm sorry, Mariya. You also understand that Liliana meant no harm, right? I'll make sure she's careful from now on, so don't take it to heart", Godou said to Yuri, who looked at him rather happily.

"Y-yes. I don't particularly mind."

"Okay, great. Lately I've always seemed to make you angry... sorry. I've been waiting for the right time to apologize, but there were no chances and..." he gently smiled at her. He felt this was a chance to try and fix his relationship with Yuri.

This miko had a really nagging streak, but it was all out of consideration for him. If he was not thankful for that, he would incur divine punishment.

If he could, he would like to stay on good terms with her for a long time to come.

"I should be the one to apologize deeply. After seeing how well Godou-san and Liliana-san got along lately, my chest grew strangely nauseous, and gave me dark thoughts... I also thought I should improve my attitude."

"Ahh, so you felt the same. True, you've been cold to me lately, huh, Mariya?"

"Please! Don't tease me like that!"

Yuri suddenly turned her face away. It was unusual for her, but she was pouting.

After seeing that, a relieved Godou turned around towards Liliana next. If he managed to gently finish the matter now... Even so, she frowned at him, her expression full of amazement.

"I am impressed, Kusanagi Godou... How you handled the upset Mariya Yuri just now revealed quite the skill. I should have expected no less from someone who became renowned for his dirty interests at such a young age."

'Seriously, you are only smooth at times like this...' Liliana grumbled.

"Hey, what do you mean with 'handle?' Don't make me sound like a weirdo!"

"There is no need to justify yourself. No matter how much you lust after women, even if the worst happens and you invite destruction upon yourself, at least I will be your ally... Indeed, I had already taken that amount of trouble into account when I precipitously joined you."

That line invited way too many misunderstandings. Sensing danger, Godou was about to chide her, but it was already too late.

"Liliana-san. What was it you just said? About Onii-chan and dirty interests?"

"I meant it as I said it. You seem to be aware already, but your big brother has pledged love with quite a number of women, and he is very accomplished when it comes to enjoying that love."

"Wait, Liliana, don't make up fishy stories!"

"Onii-chan, you stay quiet. Liliana-san, please continue," Shizuka interrupted Godou's protest and urged Liliana to go on.

Liliana answered her question somewhat dejectedly.

"Yes. The truth is, I also fear that your brother will suffer one day due to this bad habit. When I think of wicked women like Erica being so close to him..."

"Aren't you right~ Many people fell to ruin due to womanizing, right~"

Shizuka, who agreed in her responses like this, also threw harsh looks at Liliana. Her countenance seemed to say "you're also one of his playmates, aren't you?"

"But Shizuka-san, please stop blaming your brother's present sense of virtue. Since times immemorial, great men have always had great fondness for sexual pleasures. The fact that nothing but beautiful maidens gather around Kusanagi Godou is, in a sense, proof of his qualities. You should not scold him so much over such a minor matter."

"Hmmm? So that's how you think about it?"

"Yes. In short, we simply need to avoid situations where he loses his way due to women. And seeing to that is my duty, the duty of the one who is in waiting by his side. I shall protect your brother without fail. So, Shizuka-san, if you could please be more tolerant?"

"Onii-chan, aren't you lucky? Liliana-san understands even your womanizing." Shizuka ignored Liliana's admonishment disinterestedly. Trying to follow their conversation left Godou quite perplexed.

"So, you're saying Onii-chan doesn't need to reflect on his behavior?"

"No, I cannot state that with certainty. Even as a playmate, he should probably avoid Erica. In Mariya Yuri's case... it depends on her behavior from now on. From my point of view, he should aim for women that cause less trouble in the future," Liliana said and directed her judging gaze at the Hime-Miko, who was blessed with beauty in both expression and physique.

Yuri reacted with bewilderment.

"Hey, isn't this going in a strange direction!?"

"No. I believe the direction is correct. If you do not correct your womanizing attitude, there will be people who seek to make use of it later."

"Li-Liliana-san, aren't you saying a tiny little bit too much..."

A sour-looking Godou was faced with a composed Liliana and Yuri, who had taken a complete turn from her earlier attitude to the defensive.

These three were cynically watched by Shizuka.

"Mariya-san is all over you just because you were a little nice to her. Liliana-san is open to your affairs and ready to recognize them . If one of them becomes your wife, you won't even need to go through all the trouble grandpa did. Isn't that great for you, Onii-chan."

He wasn't in control anymore. It was just then when Godou looked up at the sky in resignation.

"A pleasant day to you, everybody. It seems to be very lively and fun here. Hello, Godou, I couldn't tell you this morning, but instead I'll tell you right now with lots of affection included. I am really happy to be able to see you."

Someone greeted them in a self-serving tone.

While radiating elegance and grace, Erica showed herself on the rooftop. Even the school's summer uniform looked like it was custom-tailored for her.

More than her superficial beauty, it was her inner values that let this girl shine.

"Oh, I thought something has happened, and looking at your faces I can pretty much guess."

While looking at everybody around her, Erica radiantly asked her old friend and rival: "Lily, please give me a sandwich, too. I've only had a cappuccino today so I'm starved."

"Th-there is a lot of other food. Even if it is not mine..."

"But it's made by you, isn't it? And it looks to be the most delicious. When you have room to choose, choosing the most delicious or interesting one is my principle. You know that, right?"

"You are as selfish a girl as always!"

Liliana sounded abusive, but when she heard the praise " delicious," she held out the package of sandwiches, seeming not as annoyed as she would have others believe.

Erica accepted one with the beautiful smile of a lady and turned her eyes to Yuri.

"I'm glad for you, Yuri. You managed to make up with Godou, didn't you? Ever since the summer break, you've been completely awkward; it was painful to look at. Please allow me to congratulate you."

"Ah, yes. Thanks to you I somehow..."

Erica had done nothing at all, but the overwhelmed Yuri thanked her.

Then she turned to Shizuka and continued courteously and sociably: "Shizuka-san, I know that you are irritated but please let it slide already. At the beginning of the 2nd school term, it had been so long since I had gotten to meet Godou that we ended up overdoing it. Look, he was with you for all of August..."

"U-using that as a reason..."

"Godou told me, you know, that he'd spend the rest of the holidays with his little sister, so he couldn't meet me as much. It was sad, but being with one's family was also important, so I bore it. I wouldn't call this return for that, but could you let this pass? Please...?"

Certainly, he had not met Erica very much during August. She had excused herself for being busy with work for the magic society [Copper Black Cross] and had apparently been bustling about all over the place. At that time, he had also been distant with Yuri, and Liliana had only arrived in Japan at the very end of the holidays.

So they had not met not because Godou had asked them, but...

"I-is that so, Onii-chan? Is that why you accompanied me?"

"Uhhm, what should I say..."

"Don't be shy, Godou. Weren't you worried that you weren't looking after your little sister enough?"

"I see... Ohh Onii-chan, it's embarrassing how you can't bear being away from me," Shizuka said somewhat happily, sharply turning her head away. It was unknown if the excuse just now had worked, but it looked like the danger had passed.

Thereupon Erica made a declaration to everyone present with a radiant smile on her face.

"Then, now that the arguments are settled, let us go back to lunch. Meals should be held cheerful and fun. We must choose an appropriate topic."

Following her lead, everyone sat down on the rooftop floor.

Erica slid into Godou's right armpit quite naturally and sat down right next to him.

Yuri, who had been in that position so far, had handed it over without any thought... That single act showed their power relationship and made Godou secretly groan.

Erica really was dreadful.

Her actions just now were the skills of a [Queen] controlling her royal court.

(...Godou. You probably got it already, but with this, the number of favors you owe me has grown by one. Remember that.)

Erica, sitting by his side, quietly whispered to him. Of course Godou could not object.

Part 3

After school, Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar walked through the shopping district in Nezu, where the Kusanagi's house was located.

Godou had said that he had somewhere to drop by and had gone home right after classes were finished.

Apparently, Yuri also had her duties as a miko and had gone home alone.

Erica made her way home while elegantly driving away the boys approaching her as if they were biting lice. But on the way, she spotted Liliana in the shopping district.

"A pleasant day to you, Lily. Are you going to Godou's after this? Well met. I was also thinking about visiting, so let's go together," Erica forcibly turned them into traveling companions.

Liliana frowned unhappily but started walking close to her anyway.

"Erica... I do not think there is any reason for you to go to the Kusanagi house."

She bluntly treated the knight who was her childhood friend and rival as a bother.

"I intend to cook dinner at his house. Since you cannot cook, you will be of no use even if you come along. I would like you to not interfere with my duties..."

So that was it after all. Erica nodded to herself.

Ever since long ago, this girl had the bad habit of not thinking much about how to spend her time and effort. So then, should she chide her, or make fun of her for it?

After a moment of thought, Erica decided that in this situation, she should just do both.

"Oh my, I wouldn't interfere, Lily."

Erica showed off what Godou often called her devil's smile, while masking a quiet laugh.

"While you strive with your cooking, I will happily make conversation with Godou; grandfather and Shizuka-san, as well. I should deepen my ties with my future family, after all."

"Wh-what did you say?"

"Hehee, it might not be necessary for you, Lily, considering that you serve as his knight. But for me it's different. Eventually I will become his wife, and as his wife, I will be in charge of his army and castle. I must be on good terms with his relatives."

"W-w-wiiife!? Kusanagi Godou has no intention of taking you as his wife! Can you stop deciding my lord's future by yourself?!"

"He just hasn't said it yet. Among ourselves, matters are already settled," Erica declared while following Liliana into the supermarket.

The girl reminiscent of an Eastern European fairy took a shopping basket like it was her second nature.

Contrary to her appearance, this girl had had an affinity for housekeeping since her childhood. Cooking, sewing, cleaning, if it was housework, she could do it. Erica, on the other hand, had almost no experience with shopping in places like this.

"Hey, Lily. Sometimes I feel pity for you. You became a knight for Godou merely a few months after me, but during that time my relationship with Godou had deepened greatly. So much that you can't force your way in between us anymore."

"Tha-that is not true! The relation between me and him will develop much more from now on!"

"Oh my, really? But, doesn't Godou seem restless every so often ? A little bit troubled, like he is squirming?"

Liliana's complexion changed in an instant. It looked like she had a clue. Well, it was only natural since she had suddenly barged into the Kusanagi house and started cooking, among other things.

Even Godou, who was usually accepting of people's goodwill, was quite bewildered and bothered by her fervor.

"You see, whenever my eyes meet Godou's, I can generally tell what he's thinking. Because our bonds are just that deep..."

"DANG IT! S-stop trying to throw my feelings out of order, Erica!"

Liliana harshly objected. She was right, of course.

While there were times when Erica and Godou could confirm each other's aims by eye contact, there were also many times where they could not. In the end, the environment he was raised in was just too different.

The difference in perception that stemmed from the culture gap was not overcome that easily.

But, Erica did not feel like saying that straight-out.

At times like this, it was better to enforce her will with a bang. She had the courage and persuasive power to make lies seem true, so she smiled elegantly and pityingly at Liliana.

"Feel free to think that. While you cling to that blind belief, Godou and I will deepen our relationship even further."

"Ug, talking so frivolously..."

"So, could you please not make supper for Godou today?"

Erica continued nonchalantly just as Liliana had begun testing a cabbage in the produce corner. So far it had been for amusement, but her next advice was based on calculation.

"He isn't living alone, so outside of excursions, there's no need to cook for him."

"No, but, that's my important work as a knight and—"

"Cooking for him at his house is the work of a housewife or a maid. You're neither, right? I understand that you're excited to be by Godou's side, but it's time to calm down. If you keep pressing your kindness on them so forcefully, even his grandfather will be bothered. Understood?"

Erica clearly called out her troublesome old friend.

Apparently Godou had also mumbled to her that she did not have to go that far, but at that level it would not get through to the over-enthusiastic Liliana. She was in love with the ideal of being in love, a maiden predisposed for delusions.

"If you want to put your cooking skills to practice nonetheless, how about making something at your home and sharing it later?"

"Ahh!"

Liliana's eyes flashed open upon Erica's suggestion.

Obviously she had never even thought of that. What a troublesome person.

Still, she had outstanding abilities at her disposal. If this girl was to serve Godou, Erica wanted her to do so without causing needless disturbance. She had to hold her reins tightly.

"Which reminds me; five, six years ago there was that time when you held a party at your home and put your all into the food ..."

"Urg! E-Erica, that was in the past!"

"Oh Lily, although there were only five guests, you diligently made food that seemed enough for thirty... you have always been like that. You pointlessly invest time and effort when you don't need to, right? Whenever that's happened, I've looked after you with perfection, do you remember?"

Incidentally, Erica had also backed her up at Liliana's party.

She had called twenty people together in haste and organized a bigger meeting place. It was a dear memory. One that Liliana probably still had but would surely want to forget.

"Che! Well, yes. It is there, in the corners of my memory..."

"I see, great. Let's get along from now on as well, while treasuring the strong ties between the two of us, shall we, Lily?" Erica brightly told the bitterly admitting Lily.

They were equal in sword and magic, but in their private life Erica generally seized the initiative.

To make Liliana easier to handle, she would use this chance to stir those memories awake.

Erica decided that while enjoying her worthy rival's agony.

The two girls left the supermarket without buying anything and headed for the Kusanagi house.

But before they had walked for even three minutes, Liliana asked in a whisper.

"Erica, do you know that girl who has been staring at us for a while?"

"I wonder? I don't remember her face."

They really stood out.

Since beautiful girls, one blond, one silver-haired, and both from abroad, were walking right next to each other, it was a given that they would attract attention.

But the girl's stare, which had focused on them since their time in the supermarket and was now ten meters behind them, had one obvious characteristic.

It was a look one wore when evaluating an opponent. A gaze that differed from a normal human's, with eyes that were accustomed to fighting.

She obviously was not an ordinary person.

And her eyes revealed the fact that she did not even want to hide it.

"I have only just come to Japan. So I thought she would be your acquaintance."

"By process of elimination. But unfortunately, she shouldn't have any connection with me whatsoever, either. Well, I can't deny the possibility that she knows about me though."

The other girl presented herself without hiding, so responding to her should not be bad.

Erica stopped and turned around. Liliana did the same.

It was evening. Among the crowds in the shopping district.

Moving through the flow of people, the girl in the high school uniform moved closer.

Her long, black hair was silky and beautiful, and her features did not lose to that either. Her build was slender, but she looked like the type that seemed slimmer in clothes.

But the thing about her that caught the most attention was the long and thin cloth bag over her shoulder.

Something cylindrical and longer than one meter seemed to be wrapped inside. It might be some kind of sword. Erica remembered the swastika sword that had attacked her the night before.

The black-haired girl smiled at them in passing.

It had nothing in common with Erica's refined smile; it was the smile of an opportunist.

Today, she was just making herself known. The girl leisurely passed them as she implicitly communicated her intent.

Part 4

The Nanao Shrine was built on a hill close to Shiba Park.

To reach it, one had to first challenge the highest stone steps in the metropolitan area.

For Mariya Yuri, who had no stamina, this was quite a penance. Actually, they also had an elevator that went up and down, but it was out of order. Yet, the serious girl did not complain.

She somehow kept on climbing with her wheezing breath.

It was still the hot beginning of September, so she was already completely drenched in sweat.

That was why she purified herself with the showers in the shrine office before beginning her duties.

While soaking in the hot water, she suddenly felt bothered by her own body.

Her smooth, ivory skin was so white it almost seemed transparent.

Her build was slender and scrawny. Her limbs had no muscles to speak of, and she was so slender she seemed like she would break unless handled with care.

However, she had moderate volume in the proper places like her breasts and hips.

Yuri stopped the shower and left the stall. The bathroom mirror reflected her figure.

When going through water purification with her fellow Hime-Miko or changing with her classmates, she was always inexplicably complimented and treated with envy.

Maybe she had a body she could brag about.

She payed attention to her weight and dry skin like any other girl her age, but she had never experienced being too worried about her own figure.

If I can, I want to become more slender. That was about it.

But lately that started giving her a bad feeling.

What floated through her mind this time was the overwhelming physical beauty of Lucretia Zola, whom she had seen on Sardinia.

"Do men find that kind of build more desirable after all...?" Yuri murmured while pretending she did not have a particular person in mind.

It was not her build. It was the assertiveness and confidence of those girls that she lacked. Then there was her bad habit of blurting out harsh words.

"Hahhh," Yuri let out a sigh.

Compared to those girls, Mariya Yuri's build and personality was on a lower scale.

Because the DNA she had been born with was different from a European woman's, it couldn't be helped. It was inevitable, but that reasoning did not lighten Yuri's spirits at all.

Maybe, if he preferred beautiful, bold women like that...

'For now, I seem to be winning against Liliana-san.'

The thought suddenly came to Yuri's mind as she looked down at her stomach and she started worrying.

"Ahh, what am I thinking about! Dirty! Imprudent!"

Liliana Kranjcar's body was reminiscent of a fairy and was like that of a slim model.

In other words, it meant she lacked curves.

Yuri felt she was winning when it came to being feminine. But to use that for comparison, she felt embarrassed that her feelings were so indecent.

In the face of her sacred duty, she must not do that.

To clear her head with a cold shower, Yuri returned to the stall in haste.

Having regained some level of calmness, Yuri put on the white robes and hakama[12] of her miko outfit.

She left the shrine office and headed for the front shrine. While on her way, she exchanged greetings with the priests working in the shrine and the other miko as they passed by.

The standings of a full-time employee and a Hime-Miko were completely different.

In the end, a Hime-Miko was someone with special powers who was dispatched by the orders of the History Compilation Committee.

They were only dispatched to various important spiritual locations. Because the authority structure was completely different , even the head priest of a shrine could not give orders to a Hime-Miko. The girls were respected like high-class guests.

Currently, there were about ten Hime-Miko in service near Musashino in the Kanto region.

One of those comrades was waiting for her at the front shrine.

"Ena-san? What happened? Why are you here today?"

"Hey, Yuri, long time no see. I just thought I'd say hello."

Seishuuin Ena playfully smiled at her.

The girl with beautiful, black hair and noble features had an atmosphere that made her easy to get along with.

She was not wearing the miko outfit that Yuri was used to seeing, but a white shirt and a beige vest and skirt. It looked like the uniform of a high school somewhere.

Then there was the long and narrow cloth bag lying on the floor of the front shrine.

The moment she saw it, Yuri gave a startled jump. Its divine power was as fierce as ever.

The cloth bag was woven with a special fabric to block the magical power. But Yuri's spirit sense could still perceive the presence of that divine blade.

"Hey, Yuri, according to the rumors you're currently a mistress for His Majesty, right?"

"M-miiiiis"

At such a blunt question, Yuri was lost for words.

"His Majesty" probably referred to a Campione. It was a way of speaking that lacked precision, typical for Ena.

"I'm not! I am not in such a shameless relationship with Godou-san!"

"Ehh, really? I mean, because the committee and the Mariya household offered you as a human sacrifice, everyone else gave up on becoming His Majesty's lover. It's different from what I heard."

She was right. Yuri regretted her verbal slip.

It was a very enticing prospect—to gain influence over a devil king, a Campione, and make use of him. So to keep a lid on that, they had prepared an excuse.

"T-that is, Kaoru-san and Amakasu-san said we'd act like that on the surface, so I helped them... could you keep this a secret?"

"Ahh, it sounds like a trick those people would pull... Okay, got it," Ena said indifferently.

Yuri was relieved. Ena truly was the greatest Hime-Miko. In spite of her behavior, Seishuuin Ena had the most outstanding talent and the best qualities not only in Musashino, but in the whole country.

"So, instead of you, I'll just become His Majesty's mistress. Now this is a serious responsibility..."

"Excuse me?"

Yuri stiffened when she heard the sudden proposal. What was she saying, all of a sudden?

"Actually, this time Ena was also made His Majesty's mistress. The head of my family has urgently asked me to. Grampsy thought it was interesting so he also recommended it. Hey, you know, Grampsy? That's why the people from the committee can't say anything either."

"G-Gram, the Old One?"

He was one of the Elders whom not even the Historical Compilation Committee wanted to offend.

Even among the Hime-Miko, he had taken a special interest in Seishuuin Ena and secretly granted her the divine blade. Yuri had never met him. Ena was probably the only Hime-Miko to have met him face-to-face.

"Right. He told me not to lose to you or anyone when serving him, so I felt a bit bad. But it's great you're not his mistress. I really didn't want to quarrel with you."

"You can't! I definitely won't allow that!"

Yuri unintentionally flared up against Ena's grin and her conceited words.

The girl with the alias [Hime-Miko of the Sword] opened her eyes wide at that angry reaction.

"Hm, why? Something bad about it?"

"Th-that is..."

"Apart from having Grampsy's orders, Ena can't go against the committee either, so there's nothing she can do about it. And you're not his mistress, are you? So what's so bad, OH! Ena gets it.. ."

Suddenly Ena's expression changed to a mischievous smirk.

Yuri's face grew crimson with shame as she looked back awkwardly.

"Hohooh. It's cute how you're getting all shy. So that's it. Ena gets it... Oh, Yuri, you seriously fell for His Majesty?"

"I did not! Please don't make weird accusations!"

"Hehehe. Denying it while blushing to your ears, you really are cute. Why didn't you say so in the first place? Ena is no demon, she's properly thinking about things."

Seishuuin Ena proposed something astounding as she chuckled.

"Alright. Then let's split the roles. Ena will leave the perverted and child-bearing stuff, the work of a woman to you, Yuri. Ena will do the rest. You're fine with that, right?"

"Ehh? Ena-san, what are you...?"

Her fellow Hime-Miko showed the perplexed Yuri a radiant smile.

"I told you, right, I was ordered not to lose to anyone. It's fine since we're friends, but Ena will drive those other two mistresses out. Let's serve His Majesty, just the two of us!"

Ena picked up the cloth bag lying on the floor.

She opened it and pulled out what's inside. A broadsword, 3 shaku 3 sun 5 bu long, stored in a black lacquered sheath. The intensity of the magical power radiating from the divine artifact made Yuri dizzy.

"For now, Ena thinks she'll start with cleaning up that blond Erica-something-or-other. She seems quite skilled, that girl. Well, Ena's got her strong partner here so she doesn't think she'll lose."

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The most prominent divine blade in Japan. The power hidden within was unfathomable.

The strife these girls were involving Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli in had only just begun.

Chapter 2 - Another Chaotic School Day

Part 1

Tamaura Shrine was located in the section of Yushima[13] closest to the Kuramaebashi Street.[14]

Seishuuin Ena was greeting visitors on its grounds.

A few hours had passed since her visit to Nanao Shrine, and it was already evening.

"How do you do, Ena-san. It's been a while. By the way, if you need a shrine, just pick any modest one you like..," said one of her guests, Amakasu Touma.

He was a man in the late twenties, clad in a cheap business suit. He usually ran errands for History Compilation Committee.

But that certainly did not make him an underling. Even amongst the experts from the committee, he was working directly for the Sayanomiya family in all of Kantou[15]

Facing him was Ena, who had already changed from her school uniform into her miko outfit.

White robes and a red hakama; in her hands, a cloth bag concealed the mysterious power of her broadsword.

"This shrine is fine. Those places with many people are a pain anyway, and Ama no Murakumo feels more comfortable here as well. Don't worry about it."

"If that's so, feel free to stay. I will take care of the paperwork, so use it as you like."

Ena nodded appropriately at Amakasu's words.

She had already talked to the administrator of this place and gotten the key to the shrine.

She intended to use it as she liked even without being told. The gods enshrined here were Oinari,[16] Yamato Takeru no Mikoto,[17] and Oto Tachibana no Hime.[18]

All of them had extraordinary compatibility with the girl and her partner. There was nothing to criticize, for a temporary home.

"I heard the story from Yuri-san and the head of the Seishuuins. Yeah, how should I put this..."

"'Don't meddle'?"

When Ena preemptively interjected with a smirk, Amakasu showed a faint smile.

"You can't be that blunt now, can you? You actually do feel close to the Committee, but since those feelings won't show this time..."

"It's what Grampsy said. Yeah, my sympathies..."

"Thank you. By the way, Ena-san, you've already come into contact with Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar, haven't you?"

As one would expect, the information had traveled fast. Not intending to hide it, Ena admitted immediately.

"Well yeah. The idea of assaulting Erica in her sleep last night came up..."

"And you left it at that? A wise judgment. The barrier that great knight of the [Copper Black Cross] raised around her home should provide more than just any normal defense. Although I would like you to refrain even more from interfering with her if possible..."

"Why? Finally Japan has its own king, and now some foreign girl is his mistress? Isn't it better to chase her out?"

At Ena's proposal, Amakasu shook his head as though he were disappointed.

"Maybe so during the era of national isolation,[19] but the times have changed. Whether it's the [Copper Black Cross] or the [Bronze Black Cross], they are both extremely powerful magic associations. It might be as you say if they were agents of riffraff organizations, but here..."

"Those girls are troublesome?"

"Yes. It's like laying hands on foreign diplomats. In the worst case it might spark strife between our countries."

Ena understood those feelings well. But she had no intention of changing her plans.

Politics and diplomacy were too complex for her. Fights were more fun when they were simple. Matching blades and competing with true strength; was not that enough?

"Uuuum, sorry. Granny and the others at my place had asked me to drive those girls out, so I can't just stop now. Fighting it out with her also seems like fun. Well, let's just leave it at that, okay?"

For the moment, Ena decided to apologize in advance.

Amakasu shrugged his shoulders at Ena's frivolous apology, and her other guest suddenly smiled.

"Your honored grandmother—the directions from the head of the Seishuuins? And your guardian, the Old One, approves as well . It's unlike him to hold an interest in worldly power struggles..."

They were the first words of the third party who had kept her silence thus far.

Sayanomiya Kaoru. As the leader of the Tokyo branch of the History Compilation Committee, she had authority over the Committee in Kantou.

"That's strange. Any idea why the Old Man gave such an order? "

"Who knows? There's no way Ena would know. But even if grampsy looks heroic, he can be unexpectedly wicked. Maybe he's plotting something?"

While happily giving her reply, she showed Kaoru a wry smile.

Sayanomiya Kaoru had a graceful beauty and an aura of being lost in some transient world. There was not an ounce of unnecessary fat on her slender frame.

"You never change, Ena, never bothered about anything. That's really like you."

The expression was a bit affectionate. Her smile was clear and charming.

Her delicate and androgynous appearance defied reality. If you called her a man, she could probably appear as a "gives off no feeling of reality" pretty boy in a shoujo manga.

But Sayanomiya Kaoru had the same sex as Ena. She was one of Musashino's Hime-Miko as well.

After finishing the fruitless interview with Seishuuin Ena, they left Tamaura Shrine.

As Amakasu Touma walked off, his superior Sayanomiya Kaoru followed next to him.

She was not only the next head of the Sayanomiya family, but also a candidate for the next leader of the History Compilation Committee.

It was fine that she was still a high school third year. There were no complaints to be made about her abilities, either. After all, the problem was her behavior—the crossdressing, for example.

She was currently wearing the boys' uniform.

A white shirt with necktie, blazer and pants. Not a pleated skirt, but trousers for boys.

"Still, I wonder why the Elders decided to increase the number of Kusanagi Godou's lovers," Amakasu tossed the question out to his neither male nor female superior.

"Until now, they never had any complaints against your plan of leaving it to Yuri-san alone, so it feels strange. It will only invite vain disorder, so I'd really like to avoid it..."

"Well, I think they have their own thoughts about this," Kaoru said thoughtfully. At times like these she looked like a dangerously frail beautiful boy, or maybe girl. Even though he knew her real gender, Amakasu still felt that way. Strangers would feel the illusion more intensely.

"But if they're increasing the number of lovers around the Campione, wouldn't it mean it's okay for all the families to offer their daughters and start a debauched feast? But the Elders sent only Ena. I think that's gutsy."

"So the Elders caved in against pressure from the Seishuuin family," Amakasu grinned broadly.

That was impossible. While being convinced of that, he voiced the complete opposite opinion.

Kaoru probably believed the same thing. As expected, she smiled back evilly.

"There's no way. Just like the Sayanomiyas, the Seishuuins are one of the four families. Especially against the Old One, the Elders can't persist on such selfishness."

"So it's rather that the Seishuuins are being utilized? ...like adorning your cat with a bell?"

"Or possibly sticking insects onto a lion."

The Elders probably wanted to provoke some kind of reaction from Kusanagi Godou.

Having matched their opinions, the boss and underling made their way to the car in silence.

Part 2

Mariya Yuri's mornings began early. She woke up before seven o'clock and went to the kitchen.

Both her parents were employed. Her father worked for a certain restaurant chain (that being said, the proprietor was her father's father, in short her grandfather), and her mother lectured at a teaching school.

It was Yuri's daily routine to make breakfast in her busy mother's stead.

Sometimes, she would prepare lunch boxes for herself and her little sister Hikari.

But this morning she made one box too many and left home earlier than usual.

The Mariya family lived in an apartment complex in Toranomon.[20] Although their main house was in the Saitama prefecture, they used the Toranomon apartment for easy commuting to work and school.

Getting on the Chiyoda line and debarking at Nezu Station was her usual routine.

However, this morning she used the Ginza line and got off at Suehiromachi Station. It was to meet Seishuuin Ena. She was informed the girl occupied a small shrine in Yushima, so she would come to check up on her every once a while.

With her face flushed red and facing downwards, Yuri rushed to the shrine.

When she opened the unlocked front shrine, she found Ena rolled up in a sleeping bag, lying on the floor.

"E-Ena-san...!"

She hadn't expected her to sleep in the shrine.

While thinking how horrible that was, Yuri called out quietly.

"Hey, Yuri, morning~. That smells nice~, did you bring me a lunchbox?"

Ena suddenly opened her eyes. Her voice was so clear it did not sound like she had just woken up.

"Y-yes. I brought your share, too, so if you'd like..."

"Of course I do~. You really are sensible, you know~. You're the number one girl I want to make my wife. Good girl, good girl. My praises to you."

While bantering like that, Musashino's greatest Hime-Miko opened her sleeping bag.

She got up, immodestly clad only in a tank top and shorts. She looked thinner in clothes; while slim, her curves were amazing.

Yuri became embarrassed, as the splendor of Ena's body could easily be seen through her thin clothes.

"B-by the way, were you already awake, Ena-san?"

"I was perfectly asleep. I just woke up when I heard the taptaptap of your footsteps all the way here. You seemed totally hurried, what was up?"

Immediately waking up because she discerned who came from footsteps.

While amazed by Ena's inhuman hearing ability Yuri quietly said: "U-um, around this shrine there are so many strange buildings..."

"Ah, sorry sorry. Ena was also surprised when she came; it really is full of dirty hotels, isn't it! Tokyo really is amazing~! But it's convenient to have a convenience store so close. And there are no bears."

Apparently for half a year, Ena had gone through training in a sacred ground in the mountains.

Laughter born of a wild lifestyle made Yuri blush. They were in a quiet residential area. But several hotels of a certain kind were erected around the shrine.

"But you know, Yuri, don't you come to these places as well?"

"I don't! How did you reach such conclusions?!"

Yuri strongly refuted the idea.

However, Ena curiously inquired with a blank face: "Why?"

"I don't! Godou-san and I are only friends! We have a pure relationship!"

"Ehh~? But your rivals, that Erica and Liliana, are foreigners, right? ... I'm not quite sure, but don't they make progress that way? "

"P-progress?"

After putting away the sleeping bag, the two Hime-Miko sat down across each other in seiza.

Ena accepted the proffered lunchbox, quickly opening the lid and wolfing down its contents.

"Yeah, your cooking is great as always. Lately I've only had nuts , wild plants and the like, so this is exceptional~."

Apparently she had abstained from all kinds of grains. Ena's training was harsher than the one for other Hime-Miko.

Polishing her sword skills, chastising herself again and again, emptying her mind. Lately Yuri could not stay quiet without discussing this issue as she worried over the girl's body.

"...That is, does Godou san... no, do men prefer assertive and sensual women after all?"

"Uhm~, Ena doesn't really know either, but isn't it different~?" Ena said while happily tasting the white rice.

She spoke frankly, but when sitting in seiza she looked terrifically beautiful. Her way of eating and mannerisms were good and she sat upright. Actually, in terms of being a young lady, she exceeded Yuri.

"Yesterday, you know, after I finally came back to Tokyo, I went for some sightseeing. To Akihabara."

"Ahh, aren't there many foreigners around there?"

"And then, after looking through most of the electric appliance stores in the main street, I also entered the shops in the buildings and other places... and it was amazing."

"Amazing?"

"Yeah. There were many small stores, all so strange and fascinating. There are lots of shops that are, you know, completely pink, or like skin-colored."

"Completely skin-colored...!?"

"Nirvana or Paradise, may be like that. Whether it's to the left or right, in front or behind, there are nude images all over the place. Hey, you know the Mithuna reliefs[21] in India or somewhere? Like those, BAM, a wall of pictures of naked men and women!"

"I'm sure very pious people must have gathered there..."

She had not known Tokyo had such a sacred place for foreigners.

While embarrassed by her own ignorance, she decided that one day she would go there herself and study it.

"Maybe. Anyway, Ena understood that boys probably like these kinds of things," Ena remarked as she gobbled down on the vegetable side dishes.

She was looking somewhere far away. Like there was a very sensational scene going on.

"I think since Kusanagi-san is a boy, he's the same. In the end being naked will work, definitely!"

"You're saying too much! It's a bit doubtful at times, but Godou-san basically is someone diligent!"

"I wonder~. Yuri, you're too fastidious so he just might not be able to say it."

Yuri was taken aback when her fellow Hime-Miko pointed it out.

On Sardinia, Lucretia Zola had thoroughly lectured her on boys' mentality.

But she could not understand that profound theory in the least. Possibly, the key for a smooth interaction with Kusanagi Godou lay in that.

"By the way, you brought Ena's lunch box, but did you properly make one for Kusanagi-san? Although it doesn't look to me like you have that extra baggage..."

"Ah, yes. It's just your share."

"You can't do that! Don't forget the shortest way to get close with an animal is through feeding!"

"B-But there is no reason to. There is no reason to make a lunch box for that person in the first..."

"Don't worry about that. You need to start acting first! First, need you to approach him more forcefully, like by asking him to embrace you and sneaking over at night."

"Sneak over at night!? Please hold it, how did we end up there!?"

"I think it's easier to win his heart if you do. Hold nothing back!"

"Me, sneak over at night... don't the men usually do that? First of all, it's illegal nowadays!"[22]

"You've got problems~~. Anyway, you need to do at least that much. Ena will help out too, you see? For now, let's develop your relationship with Kusanagi-san all across today. Okay?"

Yuri paled in response to Ena's exceedingly unreasonable proposal.

"I-I can't! That's impossible!"

Part 3

Jounan Academy had segregated physical education for boys and girls.

Two classes would take lessons together; then boys and girls would split up. Godou's class five was together with class six.

The sun's rays were still relentless and the temperature was high, too. It was late summer, but the weather felt like midsummer . Therefore, the pool was used during physical education.

Once again, the curriculum called for swimming.

But that was only for the girls. The boys had gymnastics in the humid gymnasium

The feverish atmosphere was stuffy to the limit, and in the swirl of heat and body odor, the male students did mat exercises or apparatus gymnastics.

"Gentlemen, don't you think this is wrong?"

Someone asked a forceful question.

The speaker was Nanami. He often made problematic statements like "Actually, I'm a sucker for miko."

But he was also an unexpectedly charismatic leader. Whenever people did something as a group, he was usually found at the center of it all... as good-for-nothing of a center as he may be.

"'Segregated society.' Let's think about the meaning of these words once more, comrades. Gathered here are nothing but men, in a gray wasteland of a world with neither warmth nor color. Is it fine to submit to this? Most certainly not!"

Nanami was shaking the gymnasium with the heap of nonsense he was loudly proclaiming.

Incidentally, the teacher in charge of physical education was absent. A few minutes earlier, he had left, accompanying a student who had fallen off the balance beam and apparently fractured a bone. Now they were in the middle of self-study.

"So if this world is a wasteland, only those! Only those! Who follow their ambitions will be able to change this place. We have to pry open the doors of paradise ourselves!"

"Nanami... what you want to say is, in short, *that*?"

The one who asked was Takagi. He belonged to the Kendo club and, due to his large build, he was quite able at it.

But he was a man weak to strange influences and easily led astray.

"At this very moment, we must aim for heaven!"

"Yeah. Currently, the place closest to heaven in this school is the pool. The pool where our girls of classes five and six are taking lessons together! The sacred grounds we are forbidden from entering, the secret flower garden where more than thirty girls are frolicking in the water and where lily flowers bloom![23]

"But the risk is too high..."

A cool voice poured over them like cold water. Sorimachi derisively laughed.

The self-styled "Man with 108 little sisters in 2D." As ridiculous as it may be, it was a weirdness only when carried to an extreme. At least he was not an ordinary person.

"We boys from class five and six number a total of thirty six. This many people would act at the same time to appreciate the girls at the pool. Certainly it is a charming idea but we only have forty minutes until classes are over. We won't even be able to make proper preparations in such a short time. Feelings alone won't take us anywhere..."

Nanami stomped towards the speaker.

Bam! Nanami's fist struck home. Sorimachi sternly looked at the assailant who had hit him on the cheek.

"Nanami, you!!"

"I misjudged you, Sorimachi. I never thought you were such a boring man."

The one who struck and the one who was struck were facing each other, one with anger in his eyes, the other with pity.

"Back then, you'd never have used that as an excuse. You boldly faced even the most difficult missions, a hero dedicated to victory. And yet, you've turned into such a pussy!"

"What are you talking about, you asshole!"

"About two months ago. On the day before the release of 'Saint Little Sister Academy,' you fought to see all endings of 'Together with Onii-chan,' where you have to clear four little sisters, and ' Imohare!', where you have to marry seven little sisters. All that while suffering from a 38° fever and diarrhea..."

"Tsk. You remember some unpleasant things."

Sorimachi looked away from Nanami who was talking about old times.

"Back then I said, 'Stop already. Just shelve it as crap. Your body's at its limits.' But then you replied..."

"Yeah. 'I'm a man with 108 little sisters. I'm no useless brother who will abandon a little sister once he's started capturing her.' On that one day I conquered all the endings, and on the next, I devoted all my power to 'Saint Little Sister Academy'..."

Flames were lit in the two boys' eyes.

Flames inside their hearts that only lit up when two comrades with burning spirits understood each other.

"Looks like I forgot my guts from that time. Thank you for reminding me.... This is my thanks!"

"Guh!"

"Heh. How is it. Did you feel it?"

This time Sorimachi did the striking. But Nanami smiled even as he was sent flying.

His smile seemed to say, 'Have you finally awoken, you stupid idiot?' Just now, between the two of them, their fists had been words.

"That was a nice punch. It held your spirit. You've got a hot fist.. ."

"Shut it. I'm done hesitating. Let's fight together."

Sorimachi stretched out his hand and took Nanami's. Like that he pulled him up. It was an emotional scene of two men deeply understanding each other after a clash. However, finally getting fed up with it all, Godou said with a sober voice.

"Hey, guys"

The two comedians directed their stares full of enmity at him.

But Godou kept going, not losing to the pressure.

"There's so much I want to say right now, but first of all, can you not peek? You know that's like a crime."

Foop (The sound of heaving a gymnastic mat)

"H-hey, what are you—"

Bam (The sound of said mat being dropped on Godou)

WupWupWup (The sound of male students A, B and C jumping onto the mat)

"Guha. H-hey, wait a sec, are you trying to crush me?"

Squashed under the bulky, stinking mats, Godou complained.

The weight of the three students weighed down on him, so it was quite painful. He barely managed to stick his head out from under the mat and secure some oxygen.

"Dammit, he's alive. Well, killing him would be bad, too."

"If you like, I can finish him."

"Calm down. If we do it, we must do it carefully from where his legs can't reach."

The three idiots Nanami, Takagi and Sorimachi said some dangerous things.

Godou loudly asked the other boys surrounding them.

"Do you guys resent me or what? Why the heck do you do this to me?"

"You ask why?"

Nanami glanced down with a cold look.

"Let me ask you then. Kusanagi, why can you say things like ' Don't peek'?"

"Hiding at the school pool and peeking is a hair's width away from committing a crime. Most of all, don't you feel bad for the girls? Don't ask me such obvious questions..."

Godou made sound arguments while silently praying for everyone to quickly regain their senses. If they lost their way over a momentary whim, in all likelihood they would come to regret it in the future. But that question made most of the students in class five and six go even wilder. Some were even crying tears of frustration.

"You damn hypocrite..."

"Damn it all. You're looking down on us because you have no problems getting girls..."

"Anzai-sensei, we want to see girls in swimsuits!"

"Everyone, calm down. Together with everyone's anger and suffering, I will do the talking. I'll teach this harem bastard who thinks it's normal to capture several girls at the same time about our pure hearts!"

Nanami took control of everyone present and looked down on Godou once again.

"Hey, Kusanagi, I like girls in swimsuits. It's no exaggeration to say I love them."

"Well, I won't criticize your personal hobbies."

"Just shut it and listen. I like girls in swimsuits... that's right. In year one, class five and six, Arakawa-san stands out for having a great body, doesn't she? And obviously the appeal of Miyama-san's small build and flat chest strikes home with those enthusiasts. We can expect the swimsuit to bring forth another kind of charm in the bespectacled Sawa-san, too. And Nagasato's plumpness should turn into the characteristic soothing aura that slender girls don't have. But, even so."

Nanami strongly clenched his fist. He probably was about to present his good-for-nothing pet theory.

"Even if those girls are so fascinating, in terms of idol groups, they wouldn't be in the front row. They are the second row, so to speak, reserve members. So, who's the crème de la crème?"

"Hmm... I don't know."

He had an idea of the other's emotions, but Godou dared playing dumb.

"Erica-sama with her supremely gorgeous body. Mariya-san who makes you wonder if she's hiding splendid sizes somewhere. And then there is Liliana-san who became the 'Number One girl I want to put in a leotard' with her fairy body... You asshole who monopolizes those celebrated flowers will never understand what makes our blood boil. No, like you'd be allowed to know!"

"I've got a proposal! Let's lock Kusanagi-san into the equipment room like this!"

"That's a great idea! Alright, someone go find the key!"

"Okay, now it's time to pay the piper, you bastard. Muahahahaa !"

In response to Nanami's fervent speech, the boys' voices strangely started to well up here and there.

Thus the union of boys from class five and six had locked Kusanagi Godou into the equipment room and started marching toward the paradise of maidens frolicking in water.

Part 4

"If you think about it, this might be a good chance. Erica, let us finally find out who is better through swimming."

"A swimming competition? With you? No thanks."

Classes five and six were having lessons together.

By the poolside, two girls were having a conversation like that.

Of course, they were Liliana Kranjcar and Erica Blandelli. Jounan Academy's swimming uniform was a one-piece with a daring hole in the back.

The ones wearing it the most splendidly were these girls.

The girls were creating the illusion of the commonplace school pool being an overseas resort. With their blond and silver hair fluttering in the wind, they were attracting everyone's stares.

"Heheh. Running from a battle is unlike you."

"But in swimming I've never been a match for you. Our reflexes and strength are almost the same, and yet... is it because the water resistance is too different, as I thought?"

"W-what!?"

Liliana in her swimsuit was truly slender.

But being delicate alone should not lead to such results. The Eastern European girl was so slender it seemed she would break if held too strongly. And though she was so slim, she had wonderfully long limbs. Her nape like a swan. Her well-arranged features like a fairy.

Her slenderness, fleetingness, all merged to make Liliana shine.

However...

Her artistic beauty might be of an Eastern European fairy.

But in terms of physical beauty in swimsuits, in sensual charm, Erica came out on top after all. Skin toned light-brown on Sardinia. The swellings of her breasts looking like large fruits. Her hip, inviting the sighs of onlookers. The perfect curve of her ass.

And the elegance that naturally showed off all of that.

There was no forced appeal. On the other hand, she did not hide it from inquisitive eyes either.

Shining just by being there.

Erica Blandelli was that kind of girl. Seeing her standing there was dazzling even for Yuri.

"Certainly, you have always been better developed than me! But that does not mean I will take you calling me almost flat hands down!"

"Oh my, I only meant that you were lighter than me, Lily?"

Erica smiled impishly.

Enraged, Lily flared up.

One might think of these two as being fairly close, but at least the silver-haired girl denied it. At any rate, Liliana seemed to feel no timidity towards Erica.

It made Yuri envious. That said, Ena had told her before.

[I'm not quite sure, but don't they make progress that way?]

Certainly not only the extravagant Erica, but also the straight-laced Liliana was radiating intense self-assertion and positiveness.

Compared to those girls, she herself was... At this point Yuri was terrified.

(What was I thinking just now!? It was like I was competing with Erica-san and Liliana-san over Godou! No, that can't be true. Godou and I are just friends. A bit closer than usual, and there are just circumstances we can't really tell people about, and...)

While she thought so, a curious emotion welled up in Yuri's chest.

She felt a pain constricting her chest, a cold uneasiness nesting itself in the pit of her stomach, a sweet and sour hope; all those feelings were mixing inside her.

Haa. She sighed. When she did, someone talked to her from beside her.

"What's up, Mariya-san? Do you feel bad? Should I call the teacher?"

It was the smallest girl in class six, Miyama-san.

She was 145cm tall and baby-faced on top of it. Apparently she was often mistaken for an elementary schooler.

"Ah, no, that's not it."

Taking her eyes off Erica and Liliana in a hurry, Yuri awkwardly smiled.

It truly was a Japanese insincere smile. In return, Miyama-san's expression turned dark.

"Well yeah, even without asking I have my ideas... But, I think it's unfair if even you are bothered by that. You don't understand the troubles of the less fortunate, or rather, your troubles are too luxurious... Anyway, it's too unfair!"

"Mi-Miyama-san? Just what do you want to say?"

Feeling the indignation in the rebuke, Yuri faltered.

At that point class six's class committee member Sawa-san cut in.

"Yuri-san... Miyama-san wants to say, 'If they have no bread, let them eat cake.' 'Don't fuck with me,' you see? 'How dare you complain if you've got such excellent goods yourself'."

Her red-framed glasses were shining.

Sawa-san was slender; her grades placed her at the top of her year. Although she was a first year, the drama club entrusted her with a lead role. That girl suddenly latched onto Yuri.

She grabbed Yuri's chest from above the bath towel she had draped over her swimsuit!

"K-kya!?"

"See? What's with these nice boobies? They spill out of your hands when you try to fondle them. They have achieved the supreme balance between neither too large nor too small. With miraculous tightness and softness and a beautiful silhouette... In a sense, these are the best. The first-rate taste limited to Japanese beef. Those tasteless foreign products can't hope to compete! They are wonderful, Mariya-san. Come to the drama club with me and let's aim for the top of the..."

"P-please stop, Sawa-san. T-take your hands off me!"

"You mustn't, Sawa-san, calm down! If you are like that, Mariya-san will!"

A few dozen seconds later. Although panting, for different reasons, Yuri-san and Sawa-san had regained their calm.

Miyama-san was watching the two with worried eyes.

"I-I'm sorry. I saw some nice raw material and just had to invite you..."

"N-no, I am terribly sorry for making you lose your composure.. ."

"Sawa-san sure turns into a beast sometimes. Ah, Mariya-san, I don't think you need to be jealous of others. If you are bothered, what am I going to do?"

Miyama-san murmured while looking down at her own figure.

Her limbs were childish and put badly, her build belonged in elementary school.

Anyway, the one-piece did not suit her.

A child's swimsuit would be better. With that thought, Yuri was assailed by pangs of guilt.

She realized just how rude her feelings before were. And beside her, Sawa-san tried comforting Miyama-san.

"Hey, Miyama. There are also fellows like Sorimachi from class five who say 'But that's what makes it good!' Don't give up hope!"

"This isn't funny anymore! Sorimachi of all those strange guys!?! "

Yuri suddenly noticed an unrest in her heart.

It was the moment she heard the name of that boy from class five. Did not that feeling resemble a revelation from her spirit vision? She looked around.

In the pool. Several girls were swimming towards the other side .

By the poolside. Of course there, too, were nothing but girls. The supervising teacher was a woman, too.

While she was looking around restlessly, Erica and Liliana approached her.

"What's up, Yuri? You seem odd. Did you see something by any chance?"

"Did you pick up a sign of danger? My senses have caught nothing, but you are far more sensitive than I am. If you like I can investigate."

"Ah, no. It didn't feel that important..."

Yuri briefly explained the circumstances.

When she was done, Erica turned once in a circle, checking the surroundings and fixating at one point.

"Hey, Lily. If someone tried doing something bad close to this pool, wouldn't that careless fellows most likely pick that place?"

Pine trees were planted beside Jounan Academy's pool, facing the school building.

That thickly grown line of trees shut out stares from those sides.

But the side without such a blind also had a building. The wooden old school building that would apparently be demolished in a month. It had not been in use for nearly ten years and been sealed...

That is where Erica focused her gaze.

"Hmm. You just want to make me investigate it, so don't act so inviting. It's impudent."

Liliana closed her eyes while muttering.

Yuri felt a small amount of magical power leak from her closed eyes and jump towards the old school building.

It should be wizardry that linked one of the five senses to a distant place. She had probably made her "sight" scan the area.

"I found them. There are some worthless fellows there."

"Oh my, what bad people... so, how are we going to punish them?"

When Liliana gave her report, Erica maliciously chuckled.

Yuri watched uncomfortably when the two magi who could be called the top of their generation in Europe took fighting stances.

Part 5

"Dammit! Doing whatever they please!"

In the equipment room, Kusanagi Godou finally managed to escape from under the mountain of mats.

The combined armies of boys from class five and six had pushed into the room, dragged all the mats over, stacked them on top of him, and then tightly locked the room.

"Now all I need is to get out of here..."

Godou glared at the door of the equipment closet.

It was locked. There were no tools or skills to break it. That only left breaking through by ramming it with his body.

Destroying school property was bad. If there were other ways he should take those.

Godou reached that reasonable conclusion. But...

The moment he thought of it, a certain image floated up in his head. On Sardinia he had seen Erica parading in her swimsuit on many occasions. He had not seen Liliana's swimsuit, but it had to suit her very well.

...Those ill-bred idiots were scheming to appreciate that view.

For some reason anger built in his chest. And then he reconsidered.

Yeah, emergency situations require emergency measures. In such a situation he did not have to take the safe route. On the contrary, that would be a defense against negligence. Therefore, Godou decided to force his way through.

It was just when he had finished making space in the equipment room and gotten ready to charge against the door.

"Godou-kun, you alright? Wait a sec, I'll let you out now."

He had heard that voice before. It belonged to Ono, a boy in his class.

Clackclack.

He heard a key being turned and then the door opened and showed a small boy with frizzy hair.

"Sorry, they hid the key so it took some time."

"Not at all, you really helped me. Thanks."

Ono shyly laughed when Godou thanked him.

"Of course, not everyone went along with the three idiots. Including me, about a third of us have stayed here."

"Still, the fact remains that two-thirds went with them. That's rather more impressive."

Urged by Ono, a shocked Godou left the equipment room. Guided by anger he decided that he would hurry to the pool as quickly as possible and obstruct their plan.

"Godou-kun, are you perhaps thinking of interfering with them ?"

"Of course. How could I just let it go like this?"

"I see. Then... I won't say it's for saving you, but could I ask you for one thing?"

Embarrassedly, Ono presented him a tiny digital camera.

Come to think of it, Ono was part of the photography club. Thinking that must have been why he was allowed to bring such a thing to school, Godou inclined his head.

"Uhm, what do you want exactly?"

"Actually, I really like girls with glasses. It's no exaggeration to say I love them. So I was wondering, if you go to the pool, could you use the occasion to take a picture of Sawa-san in her swimsuit? Peeping is bad after all, but if it happens while saving the girls, it's *that*, isn't it?"

"..."

"..."

Godou suddenly turned his back on Ono who was staring at him like a wet puppy.

"Alright, I'll be off. Thanks for getting me out of there!"

"Kusanagi-kun! The camera!"

Leaving the appealing voice behind, Godou dashed off to the pool.

This is a story that Godou heard later.

The boys of class five and six under Nanami's command broke into the old school building, which was slated for demolishing. There were about fifteen of them.

The insolent boys broke through the sealed door and entered the old school building.

Occupying the third floor, they steeled themselves to gaze at the frolicking girls by the waterside without any kind of cover.

However, the pool was quite a distance away.

With their eyesight they could not see any details.

So they devised a plan to fulfill their desire to confirm the B W H measurements exactly. Takagi remembered he had binoculars in his bag for watching sports and rushed back to the classroom.

During ten minutes until his return, all the others could do nothing but wait.

The unclimatized old school building was hot, dusty, and stank of the sweat and body odors of the gathered boys.

And finally the desired item reached them, cooped up in that coarse environment. It seemed like the whole place was trembling in excitement before the opening of heaven's gates.

Then the old school building collapsed with a thunderous roar.

Godou ran for his life and finally got close to the pool.

Where were they? Where were those idiots trying to appreciate the girls? Restlessly looking around the surroundings, he tried coming up with a guess. At that moment, he heard a terrible sound .

Looking in its direction, Godou was shocked.

The wooden old school building was about to collapse with a thunderous roar.

The walls, the pillars, the floor—all the building materials broke into small pieces, got smashed up, and lost their form.

The sight was so spectacular, it seemed as though the strain of time had made them wither in mere moments. With cracking sounds, the old wood crumbled. And then, one could hear screams from the inside.

"WHAT THE HELL!?" or "The floor! The floor!"

"Don't mind me, save the little sisters on my hard drive!" or "I really was a sucker for miko!"

Obviously, the boys of class five and six were buried under the rubble of the old school building.

Those guys had probably peeked from there.

But now, they were shocked by the sudden disaster movie they found themselves in and struggled in their pain.

It looked like they were all going through some painful experiences. Bruises, scratches—they might even have bone fractures. You could say they got what they deserved, but he could not deny himself some pity.

Usually, such a supernatural phenomenon should not happen.

Godou noticed the girls loitering near the old school building right away.

It was the usual three. Erica's scornful expression betrayed happiness over the boys' suffering, and Liliana's expressed righteousness served.

Only Yuri was worriedly watching the groaning boys.

All three of them were wearing windbreaker jackets or bath towels over their uniform swimsuits.

"I knew it was you guys... now, whose plan was this?"

"Mine. I only wanted to use [Pulverization] magic for a bit. Looks like that school building really has gotten old. Usually it shouldn't completely collapse with the amount of magic power I used."

Erica composedly answered Godou, who came running.

He had heard that she was good with magic that creates or transforms stuff, but such a trump card was unexpected.

"I can mostly guess what happened, but didn't you overdo it a little?"

"What should I have done? The spell worked better than expected. ...and isn't it fine? With this, punishment has been dealt. The original revenge I had thought of was more complex."

Erica happily showed a devil's smile.

Not of the usual devil toying with humans, though. It belonged to a devil of the cruel, coldhearted kind.

"That is correct, Kusanagi Godou. Punishment for sins, purification for impurity. As a knight, I also intended to drop the hammer of justice on that dirty undertaking."

Liliana's expression was stern.

It was the gallant, sublime expression of a knight backed by her ideals.

Erica and Liliana's expressions were polar opposites but, apparently, the convictions in their hearts led them in the same direction.

While thinking that those two got along somehow or other, Godou looked at Yuri. Unlike the knights, she was the only one who looked like she wanted to say something.

"What is it, Mariya? Something you want to tell me?"

"Ah, no. There's only one little thing which has bothered me..."

Her bashfulness made her incredibly lovely.

With her upper body covered by a bath towel, Yuri was fidgeting—trying to evade Godou's eyes and turning her face away.

"Godou-san, is it possible that you, like those boys, want to see us in s-swimsuits?"

"...eh?"

It was an unexpected question. That Yuri would actually ask him such a thing.

Flustered, Godou averted his eyes from the completely flushed red Hime-Miko's swimsuit.

"N-no. I-I don't especially have such an interest..."

Godou went for the harmless and inoffensive answer.

His words trailed off towards the end, maybe because he knew he was pretending.

But what other choice did he have? Even inadvertently, he was living surrounded by beautiful girls. He was in no place to be thoughtless.

"I-I see. That's right, isn't it! I'm glad I asked you, Godou-san. I was right in believing you stood above such carnal desires!"

Yuri's expression was obviously relieved.

Good. Looks like it hadn't failed. It was just when Godou felt relieved—

"What a stupid thing are you asking, Yuri? Of course he isn't!"

"Although reluctant, I have to agree with Erica. She is absolutely right. Mariya Yuri, our lord is the king among kings in lechery."

The two knights cut in with confident expressions.

"I haven't forgotten the hot night I spent with Godou on Sicily. At that time Godou he, he stared at my stark naked body and then it got really rough. I won't let him say he has no interest in a woman's naked body."

Ignoring the startled Godou, Erica kept talking. Meanwhile Liliana's face turned bitter.

"The rumored affair in Zamparini's mansion? Had I been there, I would not have permitted Erica to do as she pleased. Kusanagi Godou, if your male desires ever become too much for you to handle, please call me. A-As a knight, I shall be of service without fail..."

"W-weren't there intricate circumstances at that time? And Liliana, what the heck are you saying!"

After shouting, Godou looked at Yuri right away. Although he had finally tricked her, after this topic it was all for naught. As he thought, her facial expression betrayed her shock.

"No... no way. So Godou is like the others after all, just like Ena-san said... I-I'm terribly sorry. I need to sort out my feelings, so please excuse me."

Fast-talking, Yuri excused herself and ran off.

Without the words to stop her, Godou saw her off dumbly.

Part 6

"Oh, Yuri, running away~. Hey, Amakasu-san, what were they talking about just now?"

"How would I be able to hear? Please don't ask me."

They were in a room on the seventh floor of an apartment building.

They had managed to slip into a room that happened to be open thanks to Amakasu Touma's connections.

From its window, they could overlook the grounds and buildings of the Private Jounan Academy.

"But, Amakasu-san, can't you read lips? Weren't you a ninja?"

"Could you call me something else? That sounds like I'm a fake.. . can you at least make it spy? Also, I can't read lips, but I can understand the conversation through deduction."

The two of them were sitting next to each other by the window, using binoculars.

They perfectly showed the pool and the ruins of the former school building, Godou and the girls.

Right now, Yuri was running away from Godou.

"Really? You rock~. No less from Kaoru-san's right hand man."

"Come on, as long as you have adequate knowledge and imagination, it's just basic reasoning. It probably went like this. Yuri said something like 'Idiot! I don't like you or anything! I HATE you!', I bet."

"Eh? I don't think Yuri's the type to say that~"

"I just thought it would be interesting and added my own hopes ."

Getting tired of passing each other the ball in this fruitless conversation, Ena took her eyes from the binoculars.

"Hmm. Alright, I decided."

"What would that be? Are you returning to the main house?"

"As if. I decided I couldn't leave it to Yuri alone. I should support her from now on. Seems more fun and all."

"Why do I feel like that's a really bad idea..."

Ena broadly grinned while ignoring Amakasu's impoliteness.

Magic had caused the wooden school building to collapse in a moment like it had deteriorated.

From that spell alone she could deduce Erica Blandelli's skill. That was the true worth of today's observations. She was great after all. An enemy worth fighting.

Ena nodded in satisfaction and reached for her metal partner on the floor.

It would be a satisfying battle for the sword, too. And they would be the ones winning.

Chapter 3 - Hime-Miko of the Sword

Part 1

The wind roared while the raindrops splattered furiously.

Had it been the earlier half of September, the landing of a typhoon would not be out of place.

However, this storm was different. For the past few days, there have been no reports of an approaching tropical depression.

"Yes, meeting the king today, because Ena can get along well with anyone, it will go smoothly for sure. Yes, of course that side will also progress well."

Wearing her miko outfit, Seishuuin Ena stood facing the school building in a corner of the sports ground in Jounan Academy's high school section.

She was soaked by the rain because she was not using an umbrella.

The phone she was speaking into was also drenched, but since this cellphone was waterproof, power was not interrupted this time.

"Erica-san doesn't seem like she will be easy to handle, this will be exciting. However, having obstacles will be very annoying, so if that's the case, it would be best to keep it one on one...yes, thank you, your assistance at that time will be appreciated."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword. This title of Ena's was due to the partner she had just stabbed into the ground.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. The sword whose blade measured 3 feet and 3.5 inches.

The blade was simple in construction without any curves—just a straight sword. The metallic luster on the blade was like sunlight descending from the heavens.

An awe-inspiring longsword said to be the weapon of royalty.

"This looks fine. It's just the right place to set up preparations. Actually Ena had been trying to decide which part of the school to use as a battlefield, and this place turns out to be nice and wide open, with the bonus that Erica-san passes by every day. Yes, let's go with this."

Finishing her call, Ena pressed her right index finger onto the blade of the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

As the skin was sliced open, droplets of blood appeared.

Then Ena pressed that right index finger onto the wall of the school building in front of her.

"The many-fenced place of Izumo / Of the many clouds rising—To dwell there with my spouse / Do I build a many-fenced palace: Ah, that many-fenced palace!"[24]

Chanting the ancient lyrics in a low voice.

She wrote upon the school wall the same words that she spoke.

This enchanted song carried the Hime-Miko's blood and the divine blade's smell of rust. Washed by the rain, the poem written on the wall in fresh blood disappeared.

That was fine. It will serve its purpose later on.

The only uncertain factor was Yuri, who had very good instincts . To prevent that from being an issue, it would be best to deliberately create encounters with her in school as much as possible.

Then even when Yuri felt the presence of the divine sword within the school, she would not be suspicious.

Ena pondered as she ran along the school walls. After she completed the same task on seven walls, the rain stopped, and the violent wind calmed down.

It was still six in the morning, and no clubs began their activities that early.

"Good. This is it for the morning. One should get a change of clothes before greeting the king."

Ena murmured to herself as she gazed at her drenched body.

Even for someone as innocent and uncouth as Ena, the idea of meeting someone in her current state — especially a boy with whom she will soon develop an intimate relationship, proved to be quite objectionable.

"This job is so troublesome, grampsy. Hopefully next time he contacts Ena for a job, he picks a more appropriate time. Always assigning troublesome tasks every time."

Grumbling to herself as she slung her partner onto her shoulder , Ena left the school.

Part 2

The recent weather had been rather turbulent.

For the past few days, there were sudden gusts of wind and frequent rain.

Godou walked along the wet road as he looked up at the sky. The dark clouds of the sudden rainstorm had all been swept away.

The clear blue sky seemed much broader.

Though the calendar clearly indicated that autumn had arrived, the summer atmosphere was still heavy.

At 7:30am, Godou's usual task was not going to school but visiting Erica's home first to get her out of bed.

Walking along Hongou Street, he was nearing Erica's apartment
.

Following this street that he took daily, Godou suddenly spotted an unknown girl approaching him.

She possessed beautiful soft black hair that was long and shiny, as well as an appearance of a quintessential Yamato Nadeshiko. She was wearing a uniform from some school, and slung over her shoulder was the kind of bag usually used for bamboo swords.

"Excuse me, are you Kusanagi Godou-sama? A pleasure to meet you for the first time, my name is Seishuuin Ena."

She walked before Godou and introduced herself.

What is going on? Though he felt the girl was very strange, Godou halted his footsteps.

"Our meeting must be fate. I am the servant girl who will stay by your side. We of the Seishuuin family would like to receive your blessing and set off together along the path of domination. Please accept my loyalty."

"...What?"

What was with these unusual words and honorifics?

Godou was troubled, but this Seishuuin-whatever girl, who had greeted him so strangely, smiled at him.

"Just kidding. Hey, can we not use honorifics? Yuri uses them all the time, but Ena isn't very good at them. Still, Ena will continue using them unless Kusanagi-san objects."

The image of a prim and proper high-class lady instantly dissolved.

Suddenly turning into an amiable girl next door, Godou did not know how to react. In any case, it would be best to agree first.

"I don't really mind. Do you know Mariya well?"

"Yes. We are childhood friends. Since Kusanagi-san knows about them already, Ena is also a Hime-Miko."

An unexpectedly shocking introduction of the one who called herself Mariya Yuri's companion?

That was certainly what she said, and she did have an outstanding refined air of a high-class lady.

"Kusanagi-san may not know, but there are actually a few dozen of these Hime-Miko like Ena. Anyway, the other related details can be gradually explained."

Ena smiled and said.

Like a cool breeze blowing under the scorching sun, the girl gave off an unbelievably refreshing and cool feeling.

"This morning, I received news that I was recommended and invited."

"Invited?"

"Yes, an invitation from Yuri, something like having tea with you together. Are you free after school today? You will receive the invitation card later."

The sudden suggestion greatly surprised Godou. However, if Yuri will be present then things should not go out of hand.

"Well, I'm okay with it."

"Is that so? Great, then. Let us continue with the details later, farewell."

The last words were chosen like a high-class lady, but spoken with an outgoing and friendly tone.

Godou tilted his head as he watched the newly debuted Hime-Miko walk off into the distance. The strangeness of this person left him standing there bewildered for a while.

Of course, he could not have expected the doom and chaos that was about to befall him in mere hours.

Classes had finished... it was finally the end of the school day.

After the swimming pool incident yesterday, Mariya Yuri was rather gloomy.

She never expected Godou to have that kind of interest, but then again, as a healthy male it was only natural to have those kinds of desires. However, how should she handle this?

As Yuri pondered, she finally understood the reason why she was shocked yesterday.

Having these concerns made her seem like she was trying to further the intimacy of their relationship.

Back then, Yuri frantically ran away because she could not face such thoughts and behavior. Having regained composure overnight, she now decided to call Ena to discuss things.

'Just give Godou-san a hug. You're not a woman if you can't even do something like that.'

To think she was giving orders now.

"B-But why does it have to be like this?"

'You like that person, right? Then it is the only way. If you continue to tarry, then you will be left behind and distanced by Erica-san and the rest.'

"I-It's fine, after all, Godou-san and I are just ordinary friends."

'Really?'

"Y-Yes, really. Thus, to have to do something shamelessly lewd like Erica-san..."

Not long into the conversation, and Yuri was already stuttering.

For some reason, she could not bring herself to speak decisively.

'I see I see. This must be part of the deep intricacies of the internal tsundere struggle described by Amakasu-san. Well, no matter what, Ena will assist you to get onboard. I have already met him today—Yuri, do you have something to do right now?'

"Yes, today's tea ceremony club activities..."

Ending the fruitless discussion, Yuri made her way towards the club building.

Lunch on the roof with Godou and the rest had been a daily activity, but she did not go today. Probably because Yuri did not know how to face Godou.

Glad that school was over, Yuri walked to the tea ceremony club.

This was located in one of the rooms of the Japanese style building constructed between the high school and the middle school sections.

This building housed the activity areas of cultural organizations such as the tea ceremony club, the flower arrangement club, the Japanese dance research club, and others, and was commonly dubbed the "Japanese block."

Today was Wednesday. The tea ceremony club met every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for activities.

Yuri took off her shoes as she walked into the tearoom—and gasped in surprise.

"Ah, Yuri, it's been a day since we last met. As promised, I came to see you."

Seishuuin Ena was sitting right there.

Sitting next to her was the club president Hanabusa-san, who seemed relieved to see Yuri.

"Mariya-san, you came just at the right time. Someone you know has been waiting for you."

Tea ceremony club president Hanabusa Akari was a second year high school student.

A senior whose staid and gracious spoken mannerisms and benevolent facial expressions always left a deep impression on people.

"She wanted to enter the tea room and struck up a conversation with me."

"After asking students from other clubs for directions, they told Ena to come here. Since Yuri will be here sooner or later, I didn't mind arriving early."

Ena spoke leisurely.

Would the school staff not notice someone running about in the school wearing a different uniform?

Yuri felt worried, but Ena smiled mischievously.

"Don't worry, it seems like I wasn't discovered."

"I see... In that case, is it really fine for Ena's own school? It seems like you have not gone for the past few days?"

Yuri asked cautiously as the thought came to her mind.

"Ah, don't worry about it. I never went much in the first place anyway. If attendance will be a problem, my family already promised to handle it with the school, so I've been continuing my training in the mountains."

Ena laughed heartily as she answered.

As expected of the Seishuuin family. Yuri sighed with admiration.

Contrasting with the Mariya family's impoverished state which persisted until the Meiji Restoration, the Seishuuin family's exalted prestige dated back to the Warring States Era and was unimaginably influential in all areas of society.

"Anyway, are you the one with the most authority in this club?"

Ena abruptly turned to Hanabusa-san's dignified face and asked .

"Ah, I guess so. I am the club president for now after all. But why?"

"Just instinct. Ena always knows who the most powerful person in a group is."

Ena gazed at the tea ceremony club president as she bowed deeply and said.

"Esteemed club president, I have a suggestion, no, a request. This tearoom, could you lend it to me for a little while? Don't worry, it won't take long."

A request accompanied by a cordial smile.

This completely unabashed request, however, felt like an irresistible command.

Ena had always been like this, doing things as she pleased. The kind-hearted Hanabusa-san had no choice but to nod under pressure.

What was she planning to do here? Yuri felt more and more anxious.

Part 3

At that moment, in the classroom of the First Year Fifth Class—

Kusanagi Godou was at his own seat, anxiously staring at the letter in his hands.

A private letter written on Japanese paper.

On it were the words "Please come to the tearoom for a visit after the conclusion of today's lessons." Written using a brush in extremely beautiful calligraphy, it carried the signature of Seishuuin Ena.

Was this an invitation? ...It felt very suspicious. Godou recalled the scene that morning.

At some unknown point in time, the letter had somehow slipped into Godou's desk.

Godou wondered how she placed it. Most likely it was magic. Godou really felt like scolding her not to engage in such suspicious behavior for the sake of trivial things like this.

However, Yuri did not appear on the rooftop for lunch, probably because she was avoiding him.

It would be bad if this awkwardness continued, and Godou felt that he really needed to have a good talk to clear things up. Though the matter of this letter was unpleasant, at least it would give a good pretext.

Erica had already gone outside with the girls in the class, but there was no need to get her to come along anyway.

Godou was going to visit the tearoom alone, until he suddenly thought of another knight.

"Hey, Liliana, I have something to do alone. Why don't you go home first?"

"Something to do? What is it?"

Greeting her neighbor in the classroom, Liliana resumed her usual expression of solemnity.

"A little visit to the tea ceremony club."

"The tea ceremony club? You have something with Mariya Yuri or your sister Shizuka?"

"Uh, I was invited by Mariya's miko friend. I don't really know what's going on, but I'll just be gone for a bit."

As soon as he gave that explanation, Godou realized his mistake . If he explained it like that, then she will insist on her knight's duty and come along. He should have just made up an innocuous story.

"This smells suspicious. If she is Mariya Yuri's friend, then it is extremely unlikely for her to be a normal person. I will accompany you, for I must protect you."

"Ah, yes. Though that sounds a little too exaggerated."

"Not exaggerated at all. Of course, I need to pay attention, especially when you are lacking in crisis management awareness. .. .You are always one to make others worry."

And so, accompanied by the silver-haired knight, Godou headed towards the "Japanese block."

Jounan Academy's campus was quite large, especially the forest near the boundary between the high and middle school sections. It was like a small garden and even had ponds.

As the location representing the activities of the various clubs in the cultural department, the Japanese building was also located there.

"So this is where the tea ceremony club holds its activities. It is my first time here."

"I don't come here often either. The only time I came here was when the cultural department held its club introduction fair."

The Japanese block was constructed as a long and narrow single-story building.

Godou and Liliana took off their shoes and placed them into the shoe cabinet before walking inside. Not far along the corridor was the tea room which was roughly twenty square meters in size,[25] and there were already six occupants inside.

One was Mariya Yuri, and beside her was Seishuuin Ena, the one wearing a uniform Godou had never seen before. The other four girls sat a little distance away from them, and were all members of the tea ceremony club that Godou had never seen before.

—Uh, with one exception. That was his little sister Shizuka.

"Onii-chan? Why did you come to a place like this?"

It was quite common for cultural organizations like the tea ceremony club to have both middle and high school members in activities together.

It was probably expected for Shizuka to be surprised. However, she was not the only one surprised by the sudden intrusion, as Yuri also glanced over with doubt.

"G-Godou-san? Why are you here?"

"It's me, Ena, who called him here. Now that all the guests are present, let's start the tea party. It also seems like an uninvited guest has arrived, but welcome anyway."

Ena, the only person who was not wearing a Jounan uniform, suddenly spoke.

Hearing these exchanges, Liliana frowned unhappily. Just as Godou was about to speak, she had already bent down to sit in front of the two Hime-Miko. Surprisingly, she had taken the proper traditional Japanese sitting posture of seiza.[26]

Unlike Erica who never changed her ways despite any amount of nagging, Liliana was more disposed to learning local traditions.

"...Please be wary of this woman, for she was following Erica and me a few days ago."

Liliana whispered softly to Godou sitting beside her.

This unexpected warning made the atmosphere tense, but Ena showed Godou a reassuring smile.

"Is that Kusanagi-san's younger sister over there? Hmm mmm, what a coincidence. How should I address her?"

"No, there is no need for that. She doesn't need to join us over here."

"No! Please let me join in."

Even faster than Godou's refusal, Shizuka furiously declared.

In a manner inconsistent with the spirit of the tea ceremony, she had rapidly approached and plopped herself down right next to Godou, and created a face-to-face situation opposite Ena and Yuri.

As things began to take an increasingly odd development, Godou opened his mouth to question.

"So this... how should I address you? You're a student from another school, right, so why are you borrowing the tea ceremony club's room?"

"Just use my name directly. I requested to use this place from the club president over there."

Ena glanced towards the club member over in the distance.

She seemed rather kind but timid, and was smiling in a slightly awkward manner.

"If you just wanted to speak with me, some other place will do."

"That would be a waste of this rare opportunity, so let me serve you some tea I personally brewed."

Ena looked back at the electric thermos and iron kettle behind her.

Not exactly the most tasteful tea implements, but it could not be helped in an amateur school club.

"Anyway, what is the nature of the relationship between Onii-chan and this person..."

Shizuka interrupted with an unhappy expression. This was rather rude towards someone from another school, especially one who was older than she was. Godou sighed at his sister's lack of manners, but it seemed like Ena did not mind.

"Yes, both I and Yuri here have something to discuss with your brother. To sum it up, it concerns the date of Ena and Yuri's marriage into the Kusanagi household."

Crash! Shizuka had fallen forward in a most exaggerated manner.

It was not just her, for even Godou was so surprised that he sat straight up.

The rest of the tea ceremony club members who had been drinking tea while leaning their ears over to the conversation also stopped all their motions in shock. Only Liliana sat back silently with a matter-of-fact expression.

"E-E-Ena! You and I marrying Godou-san, what are you talking about!"

"Hopeless. You've always been like this."

Ena admonished Yuri who was shouting with her face all red.

"Ah, Kusanagi-san, please don't mind Yuri, whose emotions were unstable yesterday. Actually, what Ena has been saying to this child was, the earlier she prepares herself to be taken by Kusanagi-san the better. So she seems to have become a little too self-conscious towards you—perhaps you have begun to tire of Yuri?"

"Nothing like that at all! But..."

"Excellent. No matter what happens, we will entrust ourselves to you. Yuri will definitely become a great wife, and Ena should also be useful to Kusanagi-san. Yes, though it feels strange for me to say this, but Kusanagi-san is truly someone who reaps what he sows, how admirable."

"Ena! Please watch your words, shame, shameless!"

"Even if it is shameless, this is important so there is no other way around it—Kusanagi-san, please have some tea."

Placing the tea powder into the utensil, she added boiling water and stirred it with the cylindrical bamboo whisk.

Ena proceeded to hand the container towards Godou. This appeared to be thin tea.

The series of motions were performed in a simple flowing manner and did not seem to adhere to any rigid conservative ritual .

This contrasted with the cautious motions of the rest of the tea ceremony club.

To use an analogy from calligraphy, it would be the difference between the regular script practiced by a clumsy novice compared to the free flowing cursive of a true master.

Accepting the tea, Godou brought the cup to his lips.

He was not clear on the details of the ceremony, but this was not the time to be hung up on them anyway. Shizuka was frowning beside him. Let's not say anything and try it for now—but wow, the flavor of this tea has been carefully fine-tuned and tastes really good.

Ena used the same motions to serve tea to the others. Though foreigners often disliked the taste of powdered tea, Liliana finished her tea in a composed manner. Then she turned her sharp gaze towards the one who served her tea.

Yuri was enjoying her tea in an elegant manner but with a worried expression on her face.

The younger sister Shizuka's displeased demeanor remained unchanged even after savoring the tea.

"Anyway, back to the topic of marrying, it should be fine even if we don't officially update the family registry[27] right? Since marrying two people at once constitutes the crime of bigamy. But then again, it would be troublesome to explain to the children..."

Ena made another shocking statement.

This woman is a troublemaker, perhaps even more so compared to Erica.

The shocked Godou, the terrified Yuri, the calmly listening Liliana, the sister Shizuka who was glaring severely at her brother, as well as the rest of the girls of the tea ceremony club who looked somewhat awkward...

All the girls, apart from Liliana and Yuri, stared daggers at Goudou.

'Onii-chan is the worst!' 'I-Is this the so-called adult relationships!?' 'Kusanagi-san and her brother, it's really like the rumors...' 'Those rumors, could they all turn out to be true...'

Godou wanted to escape this place. Why is everyone looking at me with such eyes!?

"Yes, it's like this. I have discussed with Yuri. For tasks like making love and having kids, Yuri will come first and Ena will just be backup. Does Kusanagi-san think this is fine? Or perhaps, you like Ena better?"

"Wait wait wait, wait a minute. This conversation seems to have taken a strange drift. This is too weird!"

"Nothing like that. In fact, this is the most important point, so the question is—what type of girl do you prefer. The withdrawn type or the lively type, which do you like better?"

Ignoring his request for reprieve, Ena casually continued her questioning.

Godou began to realize he must resolve to face Ena's willfulness with deathly resistance.

"I won't answer you! I have no reason to answer such a question !"

"Fine, let's put that question aside for now. Then let's talk about what kind of special interests you have, such as hidden fetishes? I once read a magazine article that said 'problems in sex life will cause break ups in relationships, so even if the man has abnormal fetishes, you must proactively enjoy them' Kusanagi-san, do you have such secrets, too?"

"Don't change the subject, listen to me properly!"

Resisting this girl seemed to require a properly prepared iron will.

Godou spoke to Ena as she took out a women's magazine that was not very thick.

"No matter how you change the subject, neither Yuri nor you will form that kind of relationship with me. This is the first point that needs to be cleared up."

"You already have three consorts, what are you talking about at this point."

Having spoken, Ena began to count on her fingers.

"Ena knows everything, there is Erica, Yuri over there and Liliana. See, that's already three people... Ah, and a local wife as well."

"All of them are just my ordinary friends. Stop talking like I'm some sort of enemy of all women!"

The girls of the tea ceremony club were watching Godou as if eyeing a criminal.

Godou ignored those stares, and declared strongly to defend himself.

"Yes, because Yuri is a very shy person, but I am not like her. Don't worry. Ena will work hard to become your qualified concubines. So Kusanagi-san, you don't have to be shy."

"M-Mariya, is this actually okay with you!? Please help deny this."

Unable to reverse the situation, Godou turned to Yuri who had been silent all along.

"That I am just ordinary friends with Mariya, and not some sort of strange relationship like she said, please."

"Yes, yes. There is nothing between Godou-san and I..."

"Yuri, if you say that one more time, you cannot take that back."

Yuri's self-pronounced friend spoke quietly, but her attitude was subtly different from her previously casual demeanor.

"Then just take Ena alone. If Yuri opts out at this point, then it's fine even if I serve Kusanagi-san alone. Our relationship will be very close, and we will most likely marry and have children. And then even if Yuri regrets it, I will ignore it."

"Eh? Ena..."

"If you choose to give up, I will not stop you at all. But in return, I won't give you a second chance. Being shy is very cute, but if you cannot be decisive then it's no good. Unforgivable. If you want something, you have to acquire it with your own hands."

"...With my own hands."

"Correct. You have to create the life you want to live, right? If Yuri has those wishes, then Ena will take on the responsibility to support you. How will you proceed? Make a decision now. How about it?"

Failing to respond to her friend's advice, Yuri lapsed into silence.

Watching the profile of that beautiful face in hesitation, Godou felt anxious. It was a long silence, very long. What could she be hesitating about!?

"...Yes, I understand."

At least she gave an answer. Yuri gazed directly at Godou's face , the first time today since yesterday.

Like that, Yuri shyly spoke in broken words.

"I... cannot completely agree with what Ena has said."

"Uh, yes."

Though abashed, Yuri's eyes and words carried a strong will.

Suppressed by the strength of her spirit, Godou could not help but fall silent.

"However, I believe that the future that she described cannot be denied with complete certainty. Anyway, I have no idea what my relationship with Godou-san will be like in the future, and we have already done things that no ordinary friends should have done in the first place!"

"And, and that is to say...!?"

"Hence, I cannot declare that we are just ordinary friends! P-Perhaps it will turn out just as Ena said, but it could also end up being nothing!"

To the unexpected response, Godou went "Eh?" in surprise.

Then Yuri gazed at him with her very sorrowful but very clear pupils.

"Is it possible... not to deny it? Perhaps you and I were just a mistake of the moment..."

"Ah, no, I never felt taken advantage of, just a little shocked..."

The memories of the "ritual" performed with Yuri during that storm in June resurfaced.

Godou frantically shook his head.

At this time, his sister Shizuka was going 'Onii-chan is such a big idiot, will he finally be won over by Mariya-senpai right now!?' while the tea ceremony club president was noisily exclaiming ' M-Mariya-san is so daring~'

Then Yuri immediately escaped from Godou's presence.

She hid behind Ena's back, shivering in embarrassment.

"Now, may I have a word?"

Godou, who was in a state of shock from the unexpected events, suddenly heard a stern voice.

Liliana Kranjcar.

The blue and black knight was glaring sharply at Ena.

"What are you planning on doing? Why are you disrupting my master's peaceful life?"

"I am not aiming to disrupt, besides Kusanagi-san has been surrounded by no lack of rowdy events for some time already."

"If you put it that way, it is true after all. My apologies, I have misspoken."

Don't reach an understanding in that kind of area. However, before Godou had a chance to interject his despair, the conversation continued.

"However, if you approach Kusanagi Godou with any ulterior motives, do not expect any mercy from me. Remember that."

"Of course not. How could Ena have any ulterior motives, Number Two?"

Liliana gave off a dangerous presence as sharp as a blade, but Ena struck back with a casual tone.

"Number Two?"

"Yes. ...Since you are the second strongest in that group of people. The blonde is Number One and you are Number Two, Liliana-san. I understood after meeting you two last time."

"...Meaning that Erica is above me?"

Liliana narrowed her eyes. A knight would respond to a personal insult with a challenge for a duel. But even though the atmosphere reached such a level of tension, Ena continued to smile mischievously.

"If it is a one on one duel then you are roughly equal. But based on your influence within the group, it is clear who holds the greater power. That is what Ena thinks."

Godou could not help turning his attention once again towards the Hime-Miko who called herself Yuri's friend.

Though it was conveyed rather untactfully, she did analyze the opposing situation between the red and blue knights perfectly.

"It is not as you think, I must make this correction."

"Yes yes, but for now I'm just giving advance notice. After all, taking care of Number One was the original plan. Ena has always had the habit of eating the best things first."

Having casually exchanged instigating words with Liliana, Ena turned her sight to behind Godou.

"Ah, Erica-san, there is nothing wrong with Ena's judgment, right?"

She was looking straight ahead—to the entrance of the tearoom, where a glamorously eye-catching female student has appeared.

Blonde with a tint of red, and carrying an extremely rare sense of glamor, it was Erica Blandelli of course.

Part 4

"Since I couldn't find Godou I went searching... But it looks like everyone is having fun here."

Erica elegantly greeted.

Ignoring the panic in the surrounding people, she kept to her usual style.

"A pleasure to meet you for the first time, Erica-san. My name is Seishuuin Ena, and I am Yuri's friend."

"Ah, but it seems like this is not our first meeting."

To Erica's subtle smile, Ena grinned like a prankster.

"Well, this kind of conversation is our first. Let's just leave it at that. Great, today's goal was to meet the girl who is Number One, and I was worrying I had missed my chance."

"I hope I have not failed your expectations."

"...Erica, may I be this woman's opponent?"

Liliana interrupted their conversation.

But Erica thought for a short while, then simply denied her request with a quick "no, not accepted."

"I wish to make that woman pay the price for insulting me. Do not hinder a knight's vengeance."

"I don't want to hinder you, but it can't be helped. I plan to have a political discussion with that woman. If you wish, Liliana, you can substitute for me, but I know you hate that kind of task, right?"

Erica smiled generously as she spoke.

Shizuka and the rest of the tea ceremony club were frozen with surprise, but who could blame them?

But Godou could sense the meaning behind his companion's words.

Erica wanted to interview this strange intruder in order to clarify her intentions and reach a binding agreement.

This course of action required great intellect and political acumen.

To be honest, this would have been somewhat difficult for the slightly crude Liliana. If Erica were to enter into a dialogue, would things end peacefully? Godou nodded to the [Diavolo Rosso].

"Then I leave the matter in your care, Erica. Don't make things go out of hand."

"Of course, then let Liliana stay by Godou's side?"

Liliana felt unimpressed by the orders and turned her face aside , but did not complain, presumably because she realized the difference in suitability to the task.

"I can't come along?"

"It's not necessary this time. It would be more troublesome to negotiate with that woman in your presence. Why don't you and Yuri stay here to clean up, is that fine, Yuri?"

"Yes, yes. I understand."

Erica answered Godou neatly, and then gave Yuri directions.

This was the kind of situation where Erica could exert her prided social skills.

Ena also stood up and took the bag that was leaning against the wall. This was the same bag slung over her shoulder, and seemed to be one of those long and narrow bags made of cloth used to carry a bamboo sword or the like.

With a smile at the corner of her lips, it was as if Ena specifically wanted others to know her happiness, a smile devoid of darkness.

"Have you made your decision? Then let's go outside?"

"I see. It would be troublesome to bother our friends of the tea ceremony club any longer. —Then everyone, we will take our leave first. Let us carefully enjoy what is to come next."

And then Erica left and walked outside like a noblewoman excusing herself from a party in progress.

With relaxed footsteps, Ena followed behind her.

Godou watched with worry as the Hime-Miko and the Great Knight left.

As they reached the outside of the Japanese block, Erica began to run in the woods.

Following closely behind her was the Hime-Miko named Seishuuin Ena.

The martial arts level of that woman was at no ordinary level. Erica could sense that level of power from the motions of her body.

Footsteps that were virtually silent, and moving about with an extremely stable center of gravity. Even if you hung a bell on her ankle, this woman could probably walk around without making a sound.

Amakasu Touma. The special operative of the History Compilation Committee.

That man also had similar motions and manner of walking, though to be precise, they are on two completely different levels.

"Actually, there is something I would like to apologize to Erica-san first."

Ena suddenly spoke.

"The incident several days ago? To be honest, that kind of present did give me a bit of trouble."

Erica took out the piece of metal from the pocket of her uniform.

It was the manji (卍) shaped blade fragment that attacked her on the road that night.

Erica tossed the fragment at Ena's feet, and the sharp piece of metal swiftly embedded itself into the soft ground.

"Ah, this? No no, that's not what I was referring to. I'm sure a little trinket like that would have been easily handled by Erica-san. Should I bring out something a little stronger?"

Laughing at the metal fragment, Ena's casual smile admitted that she was the culprit of that attack.

A very perfect smile that conveyed the consistency between her outward expression and inner thoughts.

"Given that the level of Japanese manufacturing techniques should be above this, amuse me."

"Oh, is that so? Then let me show you this."

The black-haired Hime-Miko took out from her pocket several pieces of paper.

Long narrow rectangular pieces of paper, covered with many different kanji of various sizes.

Due to the severity of their tattered condition, Erica could hardly make out the words and the only character she barely recognized was the one for "sword"—was this some sort of spell?

"Actually I wanted to apologize, because Erica-san wanted political negotiations, right?"

"Is there a problem?"

"Yes, a great problem. To be frank, Ena is not very good at those kinds of conversations."

Ena's curled lips expressed a fearless smile from the depths of her heart.

The five "sword" spell charms in Ena's hand were waiting to be deployed.

"Come to think of it, neither is Yuri very suited to such negotiations."

"Correct. Those issues are all managed and handled by the Committee, and have nothing to do with the Hime-Miko."

The five "sword" charms were surrounded by green flame, and Ena tossed them high into the sky towards the distance.

In an instant, the charms were consumed by the fire, but out of the fire emerged pieces of metal—in a manner reminiscent of swords being pulled out of sheaths.

"Thus, let's do something easier to understand! Like this!"

The metal pieces born from the charms, were those manji (卍) shaped blades.

Sword familiars that could fly.

As the five weapons flew towards her, Erica shrugged her shoulders as if facing a tiresome chore.

"If this is the way things turn out, I should have left it to Lily. — Father and Mother, Baphomet who boasts of victory, grant to me the power of the words of extinction!"

Most likely too disappointed, Erica did not even have the mood to draw her sword.

Though these familiars were far beneath the martial prowess of a knight, using magic to defeat them would be far more efficient.

Erica chanted the spell words and released the magical power. The technique of [Pulverization] was high level magic that could cause inorganic matter to explode and shatter into dust.

Originally, this spell was not very effective against objects protected or animated by magic, but—

"Not working eh? Looks like simply increasing the quantity won't be enough."

Watching several of her manji blades shattering at the same time, Ena muttered.

Erica skillfully employed her spells. Creation, transformation, destruction, and reinforcement were her areas of expertise. In these areas, it could be said that Erica surpassed everyone at her age. Even Liliana was far outclassed.

Erica infused temporary life into the metal fragments of the familiars she just shattered, causing them to expand, transform, and meld together. Virtual intelligence was bestowed upon them, and granted them mobility.

—Using the blade remnants as ingredients, a steel wolf was born before Erica. Though it was in the form of a wolf, the meager raw materials left visible gaps between the bone and skin in its construction.

Roar!!!

The cries and motions of the steel wolf were like those of a live beast.

For a creation improvised on the spot, it was quite an accomplishment.

Should her beloved sword Cuore di Leone be added to strengthen the construct? With the protection of the magic sword of the lion, strength and ferocity will definitely rise to a completely different level.

"How about it? If you want to manipulate iron, let me show you the proper way right here?"

"Amazing, amazing. That kind of delicate spell is very difficult for Ena. Erica-san's moves sure are full of finesse."

Ena continued to smile.

She did not seem like she was putting up a front, and Erica decided not to underestimate her.

"Did you mention made in Japan just now? Yes, showing foreigners Japanese techniques would be a nice service. Please wait a moment."

Ena took down the bag from her shoulder and opened it, exposing the sword in the jet-black sheath. The blade alone was already one meter long.

Drawing out the sword revealed it to be a straight blade with no curve.

"Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Let me give an introduction. This is the one truly made in Japan, Ena's partner."

The black-haired Hime-Miko stabbed the blade of the sword into the ground.

Just this motion created wind.

Centered on the sword, calm winds gradually swirled to form a vortex.

Blown by that gust of wind, the created wolf shattered into pieces on the ground, as if shyly fleeing away from steel of a higher-grade existence.

Driven by her defensive instincts, Erica summoned Cuore di Leone.

But even for the magic sword of the lion, taking on that sword as an opponent will be difficult.

Magic sword, holy sword, spirit sword, cursed blade.

Perhaps surpassing all these, an even more threatening magical item, could it even be something like a divine artifact?

"Hmm... looks like I pulled it out too early eh?"

Ena began to speak to herself and immediately re-sheathed her sword. Why did she stop if she was skilled enough to move that massive blade as easily as if it were her own limb?

As Erica suspiciously puzzled over her behavior, Ena made an awkward smile and replied, "Too bad, it's over."

"Yuri's footsteps are approaching. That child's spirit sense will immediately notice if I draw this thing. Since she will definitely scold me for unsheathing the sword so rashly, I decided to stop right here."

"Footsteps? You can hear them?"

"Ena's ears are very good, and it's not just one person, there's a man following behind... Most likely Kusanagi-san."

Ena cupped her hand to her ear as she spoke. Erica, however, could not hear anything.

Furthermore, being able to tell people apart from their footsteps like a dog could only be described as superhuman hearing.

An unexpectedly troublesome opponent had definitely presented herself.

Erica dispelled Cuore di Leone. It would be imprudent to battle and seek victory against such an enemy without proper preparations.

"Anyway, which god did that sword come from?"

"I already said, it is the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, which I borrowed from grampsy. If you really want to know then try investigating it. —Anyway, see you again in the near future."

Waving her hand affectionately, Ena turned to leave.

As she watched her opponent depart, Erica was determined to start gathering intelligence immediately.

Part 5

It was after Erica and Ena's figures disappeared.

The three people left behind began to gather the used tea implements in the room and take them to the sink for washing.

Yuri suddenly showed a worried expression just as Godou and Liliana started preparing the sponge and detergent for washing up .

"What is it, Mariya?"

"Ah, no. There is just something that is causing me concern. I am sorry, but I must go out for a while."

After Yuri left the sink, Godou suddenly thought of something.

"Excuse me, Liliana, but I leave the rest to you."

"Yes, sure. Kusanagi Godou, where are you going?"

Godou did not answer as he left to chase after Yuri.

Yuri had just exited the Japanese building and was about to walk into the woods. With a surprised expression, she questioned Godou who had suddenly caught up to her.

"Godou-san why have you followed!?"

"Yes, I felt that Mariya was acting a bit strange... Perhaps, you have thought of something about Erica and Seishuuin Ena?"

"Not really, but somehow I just feel something is off in the atmosphere."

The two of them made their steps towards the depths of the forest with Yuri in front and Godou following behind.

"Uh, so what kind of person is that Seishuuin Ena? She mentioned she was one of the Hime-Miko."

"That is correct. She is the heir to one of the Four Families—the house of Seishuuin. She is the top Hime-Miko protecting Musashino, and also my childhood friend."

The Four Families. A term he had never heard before.

"Seishuuin, Kuhoudzuka, Renjou, Sayanomiya—these are the four ancient families that have been using their magical powers to serve the emperors over the ages. Amongst them the Seishuuin were distinguished by battle strength and political power, while the Sayanomiya has formed the core think tank of the History Compilation Committee. ...It would take a long time to explain everything, so let us leave the rest to another time."

Yuri answered fluently, but stopped with a forced smile.

Noticing Godou was getting lost in the jargon, she decided to pause in consideration for his confusion.

"I understand better now. So over in Mariya's faction, there are all sorts of complications as well."

"Actually this was Amakasu-san's suggestion, that I should not disclose too much information to avoid confusing Godou-san too much."

"That sounds about right. In fact, I am still very confused."

The two of them conversed as they ventured into the depths of the forest and came across Erica.

"Are you fine, Erica-san?"

Yuri had located Erica using her spirit vision, and she ran towards Erica with a relieved expression.

However, Ena was nowhere to be found, did she leave first?

"You can't be worrying about me just because of that woman, is she really that dangerous a person? If it came to a fight between the two of us, I, Erica Blandelli would be at a disadvantage—is that what you predicted, Yuri?"

Erica suddenly questioned the Hime-Miko who approached her .

"Ummm, that..."

"Seishuuin Ena's partner, I have taken a great interest in that object. Will you allow me to ask about its details?"

To this question, Yuri lowered her head.

In other words, she could not answer even if she wanted to. Erica sighed at such a situation.

"Fine, it's okay even if you cannot answer, I just thought it was worth a shot. Don't be concerned. Same for you Godou: don't question Yuri about that girl. I think there are many things she will find difficult to answer."

Erica was speaking in a friendly manner as if worrying about a younger sister. Presumably, she was being considerate of Yuri's status as a member of the Hime-Miko organization.

It was during such a time that the [Diavolo Rosso] showed a sense of compassion unbecoming of her moniker.

Godou nodded in agreement.

"So, where did Seishuuin go?"

"We chatted for a bit, and then she bid her leave, asking me to look after Yuri, that's all."

"You two did not come into any conflict?"

"Of course not, please don't talk about me like some rabid dog. I sure don't have a problem with randomly biting people regardless of the situation."

Godou nodded at Erica's report and decided to go home.

Leaving Yuri to return to the Nanao Shrine, Godou went to the Japanese block to meet Liliana.

The silver-haired knight was naturally quite miffed, and Godou apologetically accompanied her to the school gates.

"Anyway, a lot sure happened today, I hope I can take a casual stroll back home."

As Godou complained to himself, Erica and Liliana exchanged glances and looked at him in a subtle manner as if he had said something wrong.

"Just spit it out if you want to say something. This is making me uncomfortable."

"Then I will go ahead. Kusanagi Godou, it is a shame that what you just hoped will not materialize."

"Haven't you noticed that this incident will be one of your greatest trials?"

Being talked to like that by the blue and red knights, Godou felt his fury rising.

Both of them are talking like I was some kind of idiot—but as his anger rose, Godou finally realized.

What a fool I am, how could I forget that particular individual?

Ten meters outside the school gates.

A petite girl was standing very upright against the red glow of the sunset.

She was Kusanagi Shizuka, the one dressed in the middle school uniform.

The younger sister who had heard the conversations at the tearoom just now.

Backlit by the sunset, her facial expression was not visible. Then again, there was no need to see it. After all, there was no other possibility but a face full of fury.

"Little sister Shizuka, forgive him no matter what excuses he makes, please? No matter what, one day Godou will show you the truth. ...By the way, Lily and I will be taking another route today, so we'll let you two siblings get along, no problem—"

A truly diabolical smile.

Godou felt his body weighted down by Erica's softly spoken words as she made that expression.

Chapter 4 - Date Proposal

Part 1

At the History Compilation Committee, Tokyo Akasaka branch.

After eleven o'clock at night.

Amakasu Touma stayed behind by himself at the office.

However, this office and state intelligence agency apparently did not have many employees.

The office, which occupied an entire floor of a residential and commercial building, was lined by a number of desks.

Piled high on the desks were all sorts of computers and documents, all kinds of books (including manga) as well as all types of snacks and junk food, health equipment such as pressure point massage tools, and toys targeted towards infants and older children.

Someone working in the gaming, anime or publishing industries would likely mistake this for a competitor's office.

In such a space, at a certain reserved desk, Amakasu Touma sat behind a laptop computer—not hard at work, but browsing his favorite websites and reading anonymous message boards. However, he was not entirely slacking off.

His ears and mouth were busy on the cellphone, communicating with his boss about work related affairs.

"That matter has already been handled, don't worry, please have more faith in me."

'I wish I could do that.'

Sayanomiya Kaoru's wonderful voice flowed from the cellphone.

If teenage girls heard this kind of voice, they would likely cause a commotion with cries of 'iyaaah, that voice is super cool!'

'To be asked to have more faith in someone who bookmarks celebrity news sites and blogs of idols and voice actors on his work computer...'

"That is serious intelligence gathering, it is very important to our work."

As he shamelessly searched for excuses, Amakasu continued to stare at the online auction page in front of him.

'Other than that, have you discerned the intentions of the Old One?'

"No, not yet, but up until recently he had not taken any interest in Kusanagi-san."

The Tokyo branch of the History Compilation Committee -- Sayanomiya Kaoru and her trusted subordinate, Amakasu, had free rein to run the office as they pleased.

"Speaking of recent events that could have garnered the Old One's interest, how about the incident at Naples? The battle against Perseus."

'Ah yes, Amakasu-san called him the Hero of Steel, right?'

"Yes, Perseus is the archetypical hero of steel with the [Sword] attribute. Verethragna, who Kusanagi Godou unwittingly defeated , also belongs to the same category."

The ancestor of Verethragna, Mithra, also had a "born from stone" legend. There is also the Armenian war god Vahagn who has been called the brother of Verethragna. The hero god possessing flaming hair and beard, and born from the crimson sea.

Stones, in other words, ore, the origin of iron. Fire, to melt ore. Wind, to start fires and fan the flames. Water, to cool the newly forged metal. The intricate relationships between the elements are all essential to the various sword gods.

'Just like King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table?'

"Exactly. Using the legend of Excalibur as a starting point, there are numerous myths whose essence originated from the tale of the god of steel. To say that the 'Knights of the Round Table originate from Celtic myths' would be oversimplifying things."

'This is certainly quite a deep topic.'

"Of course, one must not ignore elements of Celtic myths, either . But in order to interpret those legends, the history of the multicultural nation formed by Britain and the Roman Empire must be considered. This should have been explained by Kaoru-san from the start."

The young cross-dressing great-granddaughter of natural historian and founder of the History Compilation Committee, Sayanomiya Koremichi, apologized in a deliberate manner in response to Amakasu's wry complaint.

'Hahaha, sorry sorry. I've been busy with this and that, what with things like school and Hime-Miko etc., and don't have much time for studies anymore.'

Currently, the top priority would be to scrutinize the movements of Seishuuin Ena, the vanguard of the elders.

Having reached such a conclusion, the conversation ended.

Amakasu decided to head straight home, so he locked the door and exited the building.

Planning to have a meal, he walked over to a certain ramen shop in the Tameike-Sannou neighborhood and stopped in front of it.

Tables for customers were placed both inside and outside of the shop.

A server came to take his order when he took a seat at one of the outside tables.

Without particular deliberation, he ordered a soy sauce ramen with a hard-boiled egg and a can of beer.

At the same time, a beautiful woman approached him. No, calling her a woman would be excessive, it would be more accurate to describe her as a beautiful girl.

Seeing the girl's face, Amakasu shrugged his shoulders. Trying to escape was futile as he would just be found again. He might as well say hello as usual.

"It's been a while, Erica-san, and you are still so beautiful. Seeing you makes me so happy."

"It hasn't been that long, Amakasu-san. You don't mind if I sit here, right?"

Obviously, he had no right to refuse, so Amakasu nodded his head in an exaggerated manner.

Erica took the seat opposite Amakasu.

The twenty-something-year-old unassuming youth, special operative of the History Compilation Committee.

Having exhausted the resources of the magic association Copper Black Cross, her social network in Tokyo, and her own wits, Erica finally decided to make contact with this man to maximize her intelligence gathering.

"What a surprise for Erica-san to visit a shop like this."

Amakasu spoke casually, apparently unfazed by her sudden arrival.

Erica smiled as she carried on the conversation.

"Oh my, I often visited roadside stalls when I was in Hong Kong."

"Yes, now that it's mentioned, you did stay there for a year or so ."

"As expected of Amakasu-san, you have investigated already, just like a Japanese ninja superman."

To this rare compliment, Amakasu responded with a subtle expression that was hard to describe.

"Recently I've already begged someone else not to address me that way. At least call me a secret agent or a spy... Besides, if you use such a description, 'superman' is kind of redundant."

"Is that so? No matter, I will respect your personal opinion."

"Much appreciated."

At this time, the server came with the menu, and Erica spoke without hesitation.

"Do you have wonton noodles? And of course, shrimp wonton would be best."

"Ordinary ramen shops in Japan won't have that menu item, please go to a Chinese restaurant if you want something like that... Uh, this lady here would like to order the same things as me."

Accepting Amakasu's order, the server left, and Erica made a frown.

"To call themselves a noodle specialty shop, and yet they don't have wonton noodles."

"Of course not. You should know, Erica-san, that there are differences between ramen shops in Japan and noodle shops in Hong Kong. You've already been here for three months."

Erica was irked by Amakasu's expression of ridicule. Somehow, it reminded her of Godou's expression whenever he pointed out their "difference in upbringing."

"How could I tell? This is my first time in this kind of shop."

"Appearing to be wise and experienced, but actually a sheltered young lady from a high class family, you're the opposite of Ena-san."

Taking a swig of beer, Amakasu commented nonchalantly.

Erica smiled. Certainly, the man she called a ninja was very observant.

"Seishuuin Ena, that girl is not a high class young lady?"

"She is a young lady who received a perfect education since birth. The ultimate Yamato Nadeshiko. But in spite of that, the child was raised in a natural environment. However, Erica-san probably didn't come to ask about that, right?"

"Yes, what I want to know is about her as a Hime-Miko."

"You sought me out to ask about that? But there is no way I will answer that."

"Is that so? 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend,' that probably best describes our relationship right now."

At that moment, the food arrived.

Two large bowls filled with noodles. From the taste and color of the soup, it was clearly typical soy sauce ramen. As well as a can of beer, which Erica opened by pulling the ring off without any delay .

"In Japan, minors are forbidden from drinking alcohol."

"Yes, but isn't this because you ordered the same thing for me? Besides, I am of drinking age in Italy, so don't worry."

"What happened to 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'? Whatever, so the enemy of my enemy is my friend?"

Amakasu took the white spoon and took a small sip of the ramen soup.

Erica also tried a mouthful, which turned out to have an unexpectedly complex taste, but it was not bad at all.

"I've heard that, recently, you've been broadening your circles. If that's the case, then you should be able to obtain satisfactory information from those who distance themselves from the Committee... Especially the state of affairs in Japan, you should have a decent grasp, right?"

"It was rather troublesome, and other than the History Compilation Committee, I never knew about the Four Families who served the emperor and their power struggles in the wizardry world."

A power struggle dominated by family clans rather than magic associations.

This was common in the world of magic, and was not really something surprising. However, it did come as a surprise to find out that the winning family were the ones running the History Compilation Committee.

"Your side is responsible too, for you guys simply didn't care for inside knowledge about Japan."

"About a hundred and fifty years ago, the victor in the political struggle was the clan of your master at the History Compilation

Committee, but it was not that complete or overwhelming a victory."

As the foremost amongst the four, its influence did not surpass the second family by a wide margin.

"Yes yes, it is correct that the Seishuuin family has been a troublesome existence to us, but anyway, since our side has the final say, it isn't that serious a problem."

"That's what you say, but then why are you letting Seishuuin Ena do as she pleased right now?"

"Well we do have our own troubles, not everything can go as smoothly as one wishes."

Amakasu conversed as he ate his soy sauce ramen.

When faced with food that does not match her tastes, Erica had the ability to completely ignore the flavor.

Fortunately, she did not need to exercise that ability this time. The ramen tasted just as good as shrimp wonton noodles.

Having finished two thirds of his noodles, Amakasu spoke slowly.

"Let me provide a few tips then. But do not misinterpret this as a dangerous relationship between enemies of the same enemy, but that I simply leaked information when entranced by the beautiful young lady sharing a meal with me."

"Hoho, I am honored."

Malevolent smiles appeared on both Amakasu and Erica's faces. Perhaps these two people could be described as a fox and a tanuki dealing in a secret transaction.

"Seishuuin Ena is the secret weapon of the elder known as the Old One. No matter what opinions this old man and his companions hold, we Committee members cannot ignore them."

"Just like the relationship between the government and the Senate."

"An apt description. Furthermore, the Old One has bestowed the divine sword to Ena-san."

"Divine sword—could that be the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi?"

"Also widely known as the Kusanagi sword."

"Ah, that's the same name as Godou."

"Just an ordinary coincidence. The family name Kusanagi is quite common in the areas of Akita and Sanuki, so I believe his ancestors most likely originated from there."

So that's how it was. Erica nodded her head.

If he had inherited the blood of those versed in magic, then it would be even better if he had more disposition towards magic.

"That sword, could it be the real thing?"

That name, belonged to the favorite sword of Japan's famous heroic god.

To name a fake after a legendary divine artifact was actually quite common. But Erica found it strange for herself to be suspecting Ena's sword as the authentic original.

However, a sacred presence could be felt from the divine blade.

Sure enough, Amakasu showed a troubled expression.

"Well that depends on the definition of what it means to be the real thing. As one of the Three Sacred Treasures, the sword inherited by someone of the noblest heritage is most likely a fake from an archaeological standpoint. However, that one, on the other hand..."

"That one?"

"Could be described as a treasure just like the real thing. To say any more would be disclosing trade secrets."

"Understood. I'll simply think of it as the unlimited potential of ' made in Japan.'"

It seemed like the Hime-Miko and the History Compilation Committee still had many troublesome mysteries, and Erica decided she must be even more careful from now on.

Like the Gorgoneion and the Secret Tome of Prometheus. If what Amakasu said was correct, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi would likely harbor the same hidden potential as those kinds of divine artifacts.

However, those objects were originally tools that the gods made for themselves.

They were not meant to be used by humans, and reckless use will result in death. If Kusanagi Godou had not become a Campione, he would have died already.

"I am becoming more and more interested in Ena-san's secrets. By the way, may I ask something a little more detailed?"

Amakasu shrugged silently as if he had no intention of answering. With no other recourse, Erica could only change the subject.

"Anyway, are you and Ena-san from the same school of martial arts?"

"In terms of ability, of course she is stronger. Fighting is not my strong suit."

"Compared to martial prowess, I've heard that Amakasu-san is even more talented in spells... Is that true?"

From early on, Erica had taken an interest in this man's hidden capabilities.

"You overestimate me. After all, I just run errands. There's no need for amazing powers, it's that simple."

Erica politely nodded at Amakasu's excuses.

Tonight's investigation has reached its conclusion. The next step will be to follow the clues provided by this young man, who truly cannot be underestimated.

Erica smiled like a noblewoman as she placed cash on the table and stood up.

"What a pleasant conversation, let us meet again if the opportunity arises."

"Personally, I don't really want to meet you privately like this. By the way, that Ena-san seemed like she was preparing some kind of trap or enchantment at your school. Though I have no idea what type it is, but seeing as it is set by the Hime-Miko who holds the divine sword—you cannot be reckless, please take care."

Amakasu signaled with his eyes, having given Erica a crucial piece of news at the very end.

Part 2

It was after school at Jounan Academy, in the tearoom of the tea ceremony club—

"To be able to drink tea casually is so great, if it was on the mountains, just boiling water alone would be quite a chore."

"Hooo..." Ena murmured to herself as she deeply exhaled.

In her hand was the cup of powdered tea she prepared herself. Next to her were the tea ceremony club president, Hanabusa-san, and Mariya Yuri.

"However, as someone who does not belong to this club, for Ena-san to come and go from the tea room so openly is a bit..."

Ena possessed nimble agility surpassing cats and monkeys.

In Yuri's mind appeared images of Ena using such skills to trespass and infiltrate the school.

"Calling me an outsider is too much, Ena has already greeted all the club members from the president all the way down. Besides, I even brought souvenir gifts today, so at least treat me like a guest."

"G-Gifts?"

The greatly surprised Yuri turned her gaze towards Hanabusa-san.

Embarrassed, the kind-hearted tea ceremony club president proceeded to confess.

"Yes, yes that's right—I just received from Seishuuin Ena-san all sorts of things. Look! Tea powder, some snacks, and then there's the tea ware!"

"Could it be, that all the things were brought here from the Seishuuin home..."

Yuri began to take a closer look at the tea-ware in use.

She had never seen any of them. Actually it was rather alarming . Such high-class equipment was not really appropriate for club activities.

"By the way, you all don't need to be too concerned. These are just spare stuff that Granny back home had gathered. Tools are meant to be used."

"True, but high class utensils should be used somewhere more appropriate."

"M-Mariya-san, c-could all these be very precious items?"

"Yes, precious but not priceless. After all, things of this quality can be bought as long as you have the money. The most expensive piece probably does not exceed one or two million... President-san, get a hold of yourself!"

At that unlucky moment, Hanabusa-san was holding one of the tea utensils with only one hand. Yuri and Ena looked after her as she entered a state of panic.

Afterwards, Hanabusa-san declared that she needed to clear her mind and left the room.

The spacious tearoom was left with only two Hime-Miko as its occupants.

Today was Friday, and because it was not a club activity day, there were no other members present.

Yuri came because Ena's phone call summoned her. As for Hanabusa-san, it was her daily routine as club president to clean and dust the place.

"So, why has Ena come to our school again?"

Yuri could not help but interrogate Ena.

"Last time, it was all your fault for creating that kind of situation for me and Godou-san—"

"But thanks to last time, Yuri and His Majesty's relationship has progressed slightly, isn't that good?"

"No, not good!"

However, it was true that the farce last time dispelled all awkwardness between Godou and her.

But Yuri would not be happy because of that. Besides, she began worrying again about what happened between Erica and Ena.

"Did you really not have any conflict with Erica-san?"

"No no, we just chatted a bit that time, and then I left immediately."

"Then why did I feel the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi stir that time?"

"I only drew it out for her to have a look, it's that simple. Yuri, you worry too much."

Yuri's sharp gaze focused on the relaxed Ena.

"Though Erica-san sometimes brings trouble to others, but she is a girl who gives her all for Godou-san... for the [King]. If you recklessly target her, you will incur a king's wrath. Please do not forget this warning, I sincerely beg you."

"I know, I know. I'll do as you say."

Did she really understand? Or is she just playing along?

Unable to discern Ena's true intentions, Yuri could not help but sigh.

This type of threatening warning should really be the job of the History Compilation Committee, but somehow they were giving a false impression of responding slowly to this matter.

"Yuri seems to be worrying about something strange, but you have more important things to handle, right?"

"Important things?"

Due to Ena's sudden question, Yuri lost composure.

"The matter of developing relations with Kusanagi-san. Now that it is declared that we will both marry into his household, the next step is... Of course, a date, right?"

"Date!? Are you suggesting that Godou-san and I-I-I have a secret rendezvous?"

"Yes, exactly, or maybe you can call it a tryst?"

"No way! Two people cannot do that unless they are married!"

"Actually, this kind of thing is very common before marriage. Don't worry, come with Ena together to invite him. To have Yuri on the right, and Ena on the left. Kusanagi-san will definitely be happy to hug two beauties simultaneously, one on each side."

Ena smiled innocently, stood up, and forcefully pulled Yuri's hands.

Then the two Hime-Miko began searching the school for Kusanagi Godou.

Meanwhile, Kusanagi Godou was—

"And thus, let us commence the second meeting of the Judgment Council Censuring the Bastard Kusanagi Godou who Monopolizes the Two Great Beauties + Newcomer. Everyone, are you all ready?"

"No problem. Let us bring to justice Kusanagi Godou, public enemy of men."

"Of course, on account of our love-communist ideals of equality, let us give our utmost in denouncing the bourgeoisie!"

Godou was currently a prisoner because of these three raving mad men.

After school, he was covered by a sack and kidnapped.

Next, he was taken to an unknown empty classroom and thrown onto the ground with his hands and feet bound by transparent tape wound numerous times. The three perpetrators had paper bags concealing their faces, but Godou, who knew their identities from the start, simply spoke coldly.

"Nanami, Sorimachi, Takagi... Though I already knew you were all idiots, I never thought your stupidity could reach such heights. Please let me go while your crimes are still minor."

Hearing Godou speak, the three idiots stared at him through the eyeholes in their paper bags.

"Fool, we are not of those names."

"That's right, we are not your classmates."

"We are the allies of justice who devote our thoughts to the people and the country, please do not have any odd misunderstandings, okay?"

Godou had no doubt that if ultimate idiots existed in this world, surely it must be these three in front of him.

"Uh... Though I don't really understand, but you guys must have many reasons, and I probably have areas I could improve, so just let out all your complaints and I will definitely listen to them."

If possible, he wanted to be released as soon as possible.

Thinking thus, Godou offered a peaceful proposal, but the three idiots angrily scoffed. Their arrogant and hateful attitudes continued unchanged.

"You bastard, your mouth only speaks pretty words... Fine, then why don't you come clean with your crimes this past summer?"

Summer? Hearing Sorimachi's question, the agitated Godou feigned composure.

If their living together on Sardinia were revealed, there would be a serious misunderstanding. This required a prudent answer.

"During summer I was living an honest and simple life, and nothing odd happened at all."

To this unconvincing explanation, Nanami muttered "Oh?"

"Then Comrade S, please report your findings."

"At the shopping street in Nezu Sanchoume where Kusanagi Godou lives, this fellow was not spotted in the first half of summer from early July to early August."

"Very good, suspicious point number one. Comrade T, what do you have to report?"

"In the exact same time-frame, there were no eyewitness accounts of Erica who used to appear frequently in the Hongou area. Furthermore, even Mariya-san disappeared from her tea ceremony club activities during that period. It is my personal opinion that Kusanagi Godou is the prime suspect based on these times."

"As for suspicious points two and three..."

Nanami spoke in an exaggerated tone, and watched Godou's expression at the same time.

"I say, Kusanagi, could it be possible that during the entire summer, you and Erica-san and Yuri-san were happily vacationing away together? Haha... isn't that a state of paradise like in a galgame?"

"How could something like that happen?! No matter how stupid you are, please think before you speak!"

Deliberately investigating my summer activities, how free are these people? Godou marveled as he denied. In such a situation, lying was a temporarily solution. However...

"Comrade S, is there any response on the lie detector?"

"He just made a great big lie. My lie detector of the heart is beeping. To this fellow Kusanagi, divine justice must be served!"

"That's right, evildoers must be executed! Let us cast righteous judgment upon this lustful maniac!"

Hearing the conclusions of the three idiots, Godou frantically yelled.

"Wait! What is this lie detector of the heart! That's just you guys guessing blindly!"

"You betray your ignorance. This is something that can only be used by males who have long been deprived of the love of innocent girls. You can call it a kind of magic. A dirty fellow like you will never reach this level of enlightenment."

Unexpectedly, Sorimachi gave a puzzling answer.

Just as the surprised Godou was about to speak to defend himself...

"Your crimes stop here, for you fellows have gone too far."

At that moment, the door to the classroom flew open and the awe-inspiring voice of a girl was heard.

Liliana Kranjcar, the silver-haired knight who hailed from eastern European ancestry, had arrived.

"Kusanagi Godou, rest assured, I will take care of them immediately."

"Sorry, Liliana, I owe you one."

The reliable knight has appeared, and Godou expressed his gratitude.

This made Liliana turn her face aside shyly.

"This is part of my mission, thanks are not necessary. Since I could not find you, I went searching just in case... If you have learned your lesson, then do not leave my side as much as possible . I would be grateful if you try not to increase my workload."

Godou forced a smile as he nodded, while the three idiots were clearly shaken.

"You seem quite confident, but what difference will one more person make? We have three people here, the power of the crowd, hahahahahahahahaha!"

"Trash like you? I can easily handle three hundred. What a joke. "

Liliana retorted condescendingly to their cheap villainous threats.

Hearing her merciless answer, the three idiots clearly began to panic.

Though they had no idea of her true capabilities, they were already overcome by the spirit of the blue knight.

"Wait, wait wait! Liliana-san. We are just trying to impeach Kusanagi Godou for his crimes."

"Foolish! Kusanagi Godou is the one with righteous goals, who walks the king's path. Rather than let you idiots impeach him, let me show you what shame is."

Takagi's explanation failed to placate Liliana, so Sorimachi posed a question.

"I-I object! You say that Kusanagi has a righteous heart, that idea is very problematic! This man is an evildoer who deceives and plays around with multiple women. Isn't he a sexual predator and public enemy of women!?"

"Do you three just plan on using such superficial slander to change my opinion? What pitiful fools..."

Seeing Liliana's slightly dissatisfied expression, Godou somehow had a bad feeling that Liliana was going to give a highly unusual rebuttal.

"Yes it is true that he is an unparalleled lecher. He will play around with girls on impulse, and is the harem king who has tainted innumerable women. That is the undeniable truth."

That is so not the truth! You've got it all wrong from the start.

Not hesitating to exposing Godou's faults, Liliana continued sorrowfully in a low voice.

"I have already advised him, he should practice some restraint in playing around with girls. I swore to maintain our relationship for eternity and forever serve him by his side. I wanted to become a woman who offers everything she has to him willingly, and become his partner. However, his rampant fetishes are a part of him, and I have no choice but to accept them."

Liliana turned her face a little awkwardly.

Uh, if he were truly someone so despicable, then just abandon him quickly. Godou could not help thinking that.

"One day, he may burn himself through his womanizing... But no matter when, I will always be his support, and I swore I will definitely save him. As long as this sentiment persists, my heart will not be swayed by despicable slander."

Liliana's forceful words were powerful, and overflowed with sincere touching emotion.

However, the content sounded like something said by a female victim of some deception or marriage con.

The three idiots had the same impression, and loudly protested.

"Deceived women always insist on something like 'he did me no harm'!"

"Hurry and awaken! Liliana-san!"

"There are still many men in this world much better than him..."

"I hope you all do not misunderstand. Kusanagi Godou and I do not have that kind of superficial male female relationship. I am only his knight, and the companion who promised to stay by his side forever. We have sworn that we will face all trials and tribulations together no matter where or when, that is the relationship that we have."

Without being aware, Liliana had drifted into a dreamlike state almost as if talking to herself.

"Though the way he plays around with women will make it tough for me... Nevertheless, it will strengthen the bonds between the two of us, as long as I become the most special existence in his heart, and no matter what kind of woman he seeks, he will always return to my embrace in the end..."

The man she is talking about must be one of those emperors or sultans, whatever you call them, that dominated the Islamic world a couple of centuries ago. She definitely cannot be referring to Kusanagi Godou. As Godou tried to escape reality, the three idiots stared at him and began to cry.

"Beast! Making a harem and getting approved! Heavens! How could you allow something so unfair?!"

"Is this conditioning? Is this the result of the forbidden act of sexually conditioning a minor below the age of eighteen!?"

"Am I crying...? Are these tears? Damn it, this is so despairing!"

The three have been completely defeated, and at this time, the classroom door opened again.

"Ah, found it, Kusanagi-san turned out to be here."

"E-excuse us for intruding."

Two new girls have appeared, and they are the Seishuuin Ena and Mariya Yuri combo.

"Uh, excuse me. We're in the middle of something. If you have something to tell me, could it wait?"

"Just a few simple words, it'll be over in an instant. I came here to invite Kusanagi-san to our date tomorrow. That is, Kusanagi-san, Yuri, and me, Ena, the three of us together on a date ."

"Date!?"

The shocked Godou turned his gaze to Yuri who has turned bright red from the neck.

"Ena-san! To have a date with Godou-san... I have not prepared myself for that yet!"

"If you haven't prepared yet, then prepare now. It's not easy for us to become Kusanagi Godou's 'women,' so you need to take more initiative."

Hearing these exchanges, Sorimachi's shoulders trembled continuously.

"M-my ears must be having problems. How could I be hearing these alien words? Hahahaha, who could have thought that I, Sorimachi, would be so out of date, to be ignorant of the strategy of the simultaneous pursuit route..."

After his accomplice's exclamation, it came to Nanami's turn to babble emptily.

"I-I must stay awake. That girl must be a fairy or a hallucination. It must be my imagination. Think about it, how could fiancées or beautiful girls volunteering to be a lover appear in a simple male high school. That only happens in fairy tales, we must have been caught up in some sort of massive dream..."

The two of them were hard at work denying reality.

Could this be all my fault? As Godou began to get the feeling of wanting to apologize...

"Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!"

Takagi suddenly roared.

His massive 185cm tall body began to shake all over.

"I absolutely will not accept this! This woeful world, this unreasonable result, I absolutely cannot accept!"

As he roared, he took the bound Godou onto his shoulder.

"Kusanagi, I will end our lives together right now!"

"Wait, wait a minute, why does it have to end like this?"

"Your existence has disrupted natural order. You are the destroyer of the world—an unacceptable existence! Let us start our eternal slumber together!"

Inexplicably making a sacrificial decision, Takagi began to charge madly with Godou on his shoulder.

Leaving the classroom and passing through the corridors, he finally ran up the stairs.

Though he has trained his muscular body in the kendo club, this mad charge was clearly out of the ordinary.

"Calm down, Takagi! Why are you so impulsive!?"

"Can't you even understand?! All the sad men on this planet—those who have never tasted love, and ostracized by all women outside of the 2D world—they have lent me their power!"

Takagi carried Godou and ran up the stairs in one breath.

Liliana could only watch in shock at the speed and imposing manner of the escaping Takagi, whose male figure has surpassed the boundaries of ordinary humans and was now challenging the limits of the human race.

Part 3

And then on the roof—

The berserk Takagi has carried Godou to the highest point in the school.

"This place should be high enough..."

Muttering to himself, Takagi reached the edge of the roof and was stopped by fencing that was meant to prevent accidents.

The unsettled Godou frantically looked down to see the sports ground not far below.

"High enough? What high enough!?"

"Of course it means to jump down from this height, is it high enough to kill me and Kusanagi."

"If you commit suicide, your family will be sad! Let's settle this peacefully right now, okay!?"

"Ho... My sister is not like your Shizuka. Every day all she says is stuff like 'brother is so unfashionable, go and die!' There is nothing left that binds me to this world."

At that moment, someone had secretly crept behind Takagi and Godou, and applied a series of karate chops. Mmm... Takagi was painfully laid low on the ground.

"What!?"

"Godou, are you ok? I finally caught up."

The one who knocked out Takagi, and caught Godou before he struck the concrete floor, was Erica Blandelli.

"I saw you were kidnapped and came to save you... But I hope I wasn't interfering unnecessarily?"

"No, not at all. I'm saved. Really, thank you very much."

As he expressed his gratitude, the blonde girl set him down gently and ripped apart the tape binding his hands and feet.

"Godou, I hope you will express your thanks with action."

"If it is something in my power, I will try my best effort... But what do you want me to do?"

Erica could not help but laugh bitterly at the unhesitating answer that clearly lacked forethought.

"Though I find your honest but reckless principles very cute, it is still very careless. It would be better if you carefully consider situations and be flexible with your judgment."

Godou felt slightly troubled at Erica's passionate warning.

Was it too careless to agree to do anything for her when caught in the mood of having been saved by her?

Erica smiled gently at Godou, but if you raised the hidden malevolence in that smile by 30%, then it would become the " devil's smile" that gloats from having played a prank on others.

Just as Godou gazed at his beautiful savior, and Erica was about to joyfully make her request...

"Kusanagi-san, are you okay? Ena will save you right away—oh too late."

A cheerful voice reached the roof, this familiar soprano voice belonged to Seishuuin Ena.

"Naturally, Erica-san never misses out on a good opportunity."

"Thank you for your compliment, not at all. Ena-san is also very quick to act."

Ena had run to the rooftop without any loss of breath, and the red-tinted blonde Erica conversed amiably with her.

Their dialogue was friendly but there seemed to be unexpected hidden barbs to their words.

Godou was mystified, what kind of relationship has these two developed?

"Anyway, this incident has come to a close then? Kusanagi-san, please answer the question just now. If Ena, Yuri, and Kusanagi-san go on a date together, our feelings for one another can be deepened."

Ena proposed without any concerns.

Date. Now that it was mentioned, it was something that Kusanagi Godou has never experienced before.

Though he has traveled together with Erica to different places, there was never any date-like feeling. Moreover, this was a first date initiated by the female side, and both of them possessed extraordinary levels of beauty and attractiveness—no, definitely cannot accept.

"Please forgive me but I must decline! I have no reason to have a date with you two!"

"If you want reasons, they do exist. Yuri and I both will become Kusanagi-san's women, so you definitely have to look after us both , and from now on our relations will only get better and better."

What was this girl openly babbling about?

Hearing this woman talk nonsense, Godou knew his face was becoming red.

"Even if we go on a date, I will not go with you two together! Public opinion will not accept such a thing!"

"Who cares what public opinion thinks, what matters is the feelings of the three of us... Ah, if Kusanagi-san wants us to alternate and take turns, then you can go first with Yuri."

No matter how he protested, Ena brushed him off with minimal effort. Godou felt a sense of despair.

Ena did not have the same oratory skills or her social techniques as Erica. Instead, the Hime-Miko had the ability to turn any situation to her advantage.

As Godou was about to back down from the overly troublesome opponent, a helping hand was extended from beside him.

"Ah, what a shame, but Godou is going on a date with me tomorrow."

The speaker was Erica of course, but Godou's mood became even more depressed.

This was a helping hand, no question about it, but if he reached out for it, he was just going to find himself in a new troublesome situation.

"I have never had a date with a boy, so I want the first time to be with Godou no matter what. Of course... after the second time, no one else but you can enjoy the privilege."

"Uh, with our relationship, we don't have to specifically go on a date, right..."

"It is precisely because it matters for our relationship that we need to date. Though we have traveled to many places together, they were all troublesome affairs, and we never enjoyed the pleasures of dating, so please do accept ok?"

Erica was making Godou spoil her by using a rare begging tone of voice.

But at the same time, she still carried the determined and arrogant gaze of a queen, as expected of Erica.

"Kusanagi-san, we have two people here, you can embrace both at once."

"Godou, quality trumps quantity. You are the only one in this world who can have me, Erica Blandelli, all to yourself. Don't waste it."

As Ena affectionately called out to Godou, Erica drew near and spoke softly.

Her lips approaching his ear, whispering sweet words. No good . If that continued, she will most likely steal a kiss. Godou felt his entire body stiffen.

However, what attacked this time was not lips, but an ominous warning.

"...By the way, let me say this, though it counts as my duty. Godou, you remember the promise just now, right? The one where you agreed to do everything in your power as thanks. Ah, I also remembered, there was lunch a few days ago when you owed me a favor. I believe that a man who does not keep his promises at such a time would be the worst."

Godou renewed his unerring gaze at the beautiful face before him. It had become a smiling face no different from a devil. The [Diavolo Rosso] lightly nodded her head.

"Erica, to make your proposal at such a time, don't you feel a little despicable?"

"No other way, if I didn't do this, you will escape once again, I have to be serious once in a while."

Speaking in innocent tones, Erica was truly maddening yet adorable.

Now that he thought about it, ever since Liliana moved to Japan , the blonde beauty's troubling ways had clearly decreased in frequency. Probably because the number of naggers apart from Yuri had increased, Erica was now behaving herself a bit more.

Or perhaps she was one to adjust her style as the situation arises . She reduced those half-joking hugs but made up the loss by pouncing on sure-kill-opportunities.

Eschewing the tactics of continual advances, instead turning to calculating moments of assured victory to attack critical weak points. Just like at this moment, the strategy of cornering Godou with no avenue of escape.

"Kusanagi Godou, are you fine! Sorry, I am late."

"Godou-san, I hope you were not hurt!?"

Running to the scene were Liliana and Yuri.

The silver-haired girl was holding the slender Hime-Miko in her arms like a bridal carry.

Most likely, it was because Yuri exhausted herself when the two of them ran along the corridors and up the stairs. Her physical stamina was clearly much lower than a normal girl’s was.

Godou deduced so, but his inner thoughts became even sadder.

No one had taken any concern for the safety of Takagi.

These girls can be described as kind-hearted and merciful, and yet they treated him like this. Godou finally understood, if only slightly, the pitiful life of the classmate lying sprawled over the concrete floor on the roof.

"Since everyone is here, then let's start over. Kusanagi-san, who do you wish to date tomorrow? Do you want to pick the happy threesome with me and Yuri, or spend time as a couple with Erica-san?"

In response to the contents of Ena's question, Liliana glared with dangerous eyes at Erica who was leaning against Godou, while Yuri nodded sorrowfully.

For some reason, Godou felt like he owed everyone an apology, but he had no choice but to make a decision.

"Ah, about this... I don't actually want to be alone with Erica, but due to some complicated circumstances, I have to go out with this fellow here tomorrow..."

Godou explained in a soft voice that could barely be heard.

Embarrassed and hanging his head, his neck was embraced by the blonde beauty.

She was smiling like an angel but, to Godou, she was truly the devil.

Part 4

That night, Erica was lying on the bed in her own room relaxing as she reached for the cellphone.

The first person to contact was Liliana Kranjcar.

"Hello, Lily, can we talk about tomorrow?"

'You deceived my master, and intend to plan shameless lechery for tomorrow. ...Fine, how do you plan to explain to me?'

Liliana answered most unhappily.

"I don't need to explain anything. For two people in love, a time and place not to be disturbed by others is necessary, so I would like to make a suggestion for you."

'Suggestion?'

"Yes, after all, you will insist on being the bodyguard and secretly follow, but that will tastelessly spoil the mood, so could you not come along? That is my request."

'T-that I cannot agree. Protecting the safety of Kusanagi Godou is a necessary measure.'

"There are no safety issues if Godou is with me. If you decline this request then it's a real shame. Your latest work will be published to the world through the internet. The whole world will know of Lily's talents."

'My latest work? How do you know of such a thing?'

"What kind of story is it, that novel, eh? Leaving her home in the quaint French countryside to go traveling, a girl was captured by a handsome Sicilian mafia boss, and became his maid and lover . Remember to keep that piece of dialogue: 'I will make you unable to live without my body from now on...'"

'Ooh, stop! No more, please!'

"Lily you sure are daring, even I felt embarrassed just by reading it. Because of that, I still haven't finished the whole thing. Right, let me read to the end tonight."

'Please do not continue reading it! I will stay home tomorrow and not go out, is that fine?!'

Liliana roared as if she was about to cry.

'You devil! How on earth do you do it, always knowing my secrets!?'

"No comment. Trade secrets."

Erica answered casually. Apparently, Liliana also suspected a traitor in her midst and had put more thought into both the location and the means to conceal her creative notebook. However, Karen has stayed a step ahead of her, successfully sending copies every time.

Ending that conversation, Erica called Yuri next.

'Hello, I am Mariya. Erica-san, how do you do?'

"Are you free right now? About tomorrow, have you and Ena considered following me and Godou tomorrow?"

The kind-hearted Hime-Miko did not know how to lie.

Certain in this belief, Erica asked directly. However, Yuri's response was rather emotional.

'I-I will definitely not do something so despicable!'

"Then let's not talk about Yuri, but it is possible that Ena-san will follow us."

'No, I do not think that Ena-san will consider such details.'

"So in conclusion, she does not rely on wits, but is someone who acts on impulse and instinct."

Normally, such a mindless opponent would not be worth fretting over, but when rare people possess such wild beast-like instincts, they prove to be formidable foes impossible to predict with common sense.

Regrettably, Seishuuin Ena was one of them.

'By the way... Erica-san.'

"What is it? Relax, I know you're bound by many restrictions, Yuri, so I approve of your presence by Godou's side and I won't cast you out due to that kind of girl's arrival. Like your feelings for Godou, at the appropriate time, I will help you and Godou get together."

Yuri was the girl who possessed the miko disposition that she lacked, as well as an extraordinary level of spirit vision.

To Erica, Yuri was the best supporting candidate she found in Japan.

Liliana once bragged that she could apply herself to all sorts of situations, but the partnership of Erica and Yuri greatly surpassed her in overall ability.

In order to oppose the versatile blue knight, it was necessary to avoid distancing Yuri.

Since other than her precious abilities, this miko had other qualities that did not lose to Lily.

"I, Erica Blandelli, will never abandon those I have taken care of. If you believe in me, I will be very happy."

'I-I know I make things hard for Erica-san sometimes, but I feel that Erica-san is someone who can be trusted.'

Yuri was exceptionally adorable when she acted shy yet honest.

'However, Ena-san has been my important friend all these years ... I hope that you two can get along better.'

"I don't plan on escalating things, but everything started with her."

'I am sorry... From a long time ago, that person has always loved playing practical jokes...'

"It's fine, so long as Ena-san shows a friendly attitude. I don't want to be in conflict with her either."

'Thank you, then we have chatted for quite a while. It is almost time to hang up... Ah, finally may I make a suggestion?'

"Please."

'Umm... though Erica-san said earlier you will help resolve the awkwardness between Godou-san and I, but you do not need to worry too much about that. Because if it is really necessary, I will work hard to find a solution myself!'

Yuri went silent after saying those words, perhaps due to embarrassment, she must have been trembling all over on the other side of the line.

Imagining her state, Erica smiled, though this miko was sometimes a bit nagging, her nature was very kind, and she did things with great consideration. When acting together, she will most likely defer the role of leadership.

And she loves Godou very much, so she will never betray him.

As an ally for the rest of their lives, her character is flawless.

Though from our respective standpoints we will be competing for Kusanagi Godou's love, it will be fine as long as I secure victory in a direct confrontation. Truly, it would be best to let Godou marry Yuri as a concubine after me.

They will be the first and second wives, guarding over Godou by his side, and no other woman will be allowed to gain an opening. Occasional flirting is fine, but he definitely cannot be allowed to get serious with outside women.

However, if it were women like Liliana with outstanding talent, exceptions could be made.

But the first requirement is that they accept Erica's superior position.

"I see, then let's do as you wish, I will cheer for you."

Erica hung up the phone.

Then, tomorrow will be the first date with Godou. She will try to let Godou decide their destination and the details of the activities; how will things end up? With great anticipation, Erica went to bed early—a rare decision indeed.

Chapter 5 - Date Progression

Part 1

Godou was spending Friday night worrying in his room.

A date. The first time in his life. And a date with the one and only Erica Blandelli.

She had said 'Since it is a rare opportunity, Godou, show me your true worth. I leave all the details of tomorrow's planning in your hands... If I find it boring then it's not acceptable.'

Girls were just so unreasonable—besides, where could he bring Erica that would satisfy her? Nothing came to mind at all!

Then the ringing of a cellphone interrupted his vexation. Seeing the caller ID on the LCD screen, Godou could not help but be surprised. It showed a very nostalgic name.

"It's been a while, Miura, how have you been?"

"Yes, well enough, how about you?"

The one who called was Godou's middle school friend, back from the days when he still played baseball.

Miura was one of the few famed fastball pitchers in Tokyo, and currently attended a high school there. Naturally, he joined the baseball club which was renowned for its strong team. They also participated in the National High School Baseball Championship this year.

"So, Kusanagi, you've already seen that, right?"

That? Godou had no idea what Miura was talking about.

"Yes, that. How should I put it, me, my first appearance."

"...Ah yes! Congratulations on entering the National High School Baseball Championship. So basically, you've stepped upon the pitcher's mound as a First Year, I didn't even realize that earlier ."

Though Miura's high school had qualified for the National High School Baseball Championship, their run ended in a second round defeat. It was during the last inning, when defeat was imminent, that Miura was sent to the pitcher's mound.

"Uh, is that so? But I was certain I'd be able to play eventually, hahaha."

His mood brightening up so suddenly, what a simple man.

But when Godou had watched the live broadcast of that match, he could not think of any words of congratulations. Miura's appearance had not been able to reverse the defeat, and in the final moments...

"No, it's wonderful that you got to play, but shaking your head at the catcher's signal resulted in a two point homerun that ended the match. You probably refused his suggestion of throwing a curve ball and decided to pitch a straight, right? Actually, your judgment was..."

'Y-You're nagging too much! Since you're no longer a catcher, don't make a random guess!'

It was not a random guess. Since Godou understood Miura's habits and preferences, he could tell from observation.

Anyway, Goudou was happy to see his friend participating actively(?) in the sport.

'Anyway, let's get back on track. Our school, which was fortunate enough to enter the Championship, is now restructuring the team in preparation for challenging the Championship again next year... And today, the coach's wife is having a baby.'

"That's great news, but what does that have to do with me?"

'Listen well. Due to this, to celebrate the birth of the child, there has been an amnesty. Tomorrow, I can finally take a break from practice. A whole day! I've never had a day off ever since I joined the club!'

"Oh, that truly is amnesty."

Normally, a sports club that aimed for the National High School Baseball Championship could not possibly take a break on a Saturday.

Precisely because of that, Godou understood why Miura was so happy.

'So, let's all go out and have some fun tomorrow! I already confirmed with Rui and Nakayama. That guy Rui said he had a great idea for something to do as a group. We should let loose together because we've been apart for so long!'

"Rui and Nakayama are coming as well!?"

Godou could not help but feel shocked, for those two were also friends from middle school.

The four friends had played under the same uniform during the Tokyo selection even though they were in different teams. But just like Godou, Rui and Nakayama had since stopped playing baseball.

It felt wonderful to meet his fellow baseball friends again after so long.

Godou's shoulders slumped when his thoughts reached this point. No way! He had to go on a date with Erica tomorrow.

However, let's listen to the details of Miura's planned activities before reconsidering.

'...Something like that. I still want to find one more person, but everyone else is busy with baseball club activities and couldn't come. I guess we'll just have to find a random person to play...'

"If that's the case, I have an excellent candidate. Leave the last person to me."

Godou confirmed with Miura, and then took a deep breath.

With that, the date tomorrow would not be a problem. Erica doesn't dislike playing sports and competing with others, so she should be happy, right? Finally, everything is resolved.

—Of course, Godou did not realize that this was commonly known as digging one's grave.

On the fated Saturday, after half past eight in the morning.

At the public sports ground in the Adachi ward, in an indoor soccer field. Today was the opening of the amateur indoor soccer tournament. In such a facility—

Erica Blandelli was sighing in a most depressed manner.

"I know I was the one who let you make all the decisions, but still..."

The blonde Caucasian beauty was wearing a sporty and casual short-sleeved outfit that accentuated her graceful figure, making her stand out very much.

"After hearing we had to meet in sportswear and bring a change of clothes, I already had an ominous feeling."

That was the message Godou left with Arianna when he called that morning.

Complaining repeatedly, Erica was displaying a tone of mockery more vicious than she had ever used.

"Even if I were to take a step back, and play your soccer tournament with you, it should not be like this. It should have been impossible for this to happen. Underestimating your inability to read the mood was my mistake."

After much complaining, Erica glanced at the friends Godou had not met for so long.

The first was Miura. Pretty well-built for a high school first year . Very capable fastball pitcher.

Next was Rui. Slender build with very cute face despite being a man. Former second baseman and first hitter.

Last was Nakayama. Puffy hairstyle and strongly-built body reminiscent of a wandering warrior.[28] Former left outfielder and strong hitter.

They too were glaring at Godou with reproachful eyes. The joy of the old friends' reunion was all but gone, as if facing off against a troublemaker—

"Clearly all I wanted was to have a date with Godou alone, but you went ahead and invited three interlopers. Virtually impossible to comprehend. Are you really unable to read the mood?! I am completely aghast!"

"To get a girlfriend before me, who entered the National Championship... And a foreigner to boot..."

Next to Erica who was scolding Godou, Miura was muttering like he had lost his mind.

"Kusanagi-san was always like this. He acted as if he didn't know how to get along with the opposite sex, but then the cutest girls would keep pestering him. This hasn't changed at all."

Rui simply shrugged knowingly.

"You traitor..."

Even Nakayama was crying a river of tears. Despite his wild appearance, he was actually a crybaby.

Finally, everyone but Godou breathed a deep sigh.

"Really, that is why I say Godou is no good. Slow, dense, and doesn't know how to catch the mood!"

Erica declared as if representing everyone else, while the other three boys nodded vigorously in agreement.

Why? Godou was completely baffled, why was everyone talking about him like that?

"Whatever, since I'm here anyway, and this is a tournament, running away doesn't suit my style. Fine, indoor soccer? You guys make sure you don't drag me down. I, Erica Blandelli, can tolerate the incompetent, but will definitely not forgive anyone who hinders me."

Erica changed her mood and declared.

This instigating tone was just like their first encounter. In a certain way, these were her true colors.

"Kusanagi, your girlfriend is so arrogant! What's going on!?"

"S-Sorry, because she's still angry at me, so excuse her mood. However, she is one to stick to her words, so please do your best... Also, she's not my girlfriend, just an ordinary friend."

Godou quickly apologized for the blonde beauty's arrogant words which displeased Miura. Watching this unfold, Rui laughed awkwardly while Nakayama continued to mutter to himself.

"I knew Kusanagi would suffer due to girls one day, it's exactly as I imagined."

"To build close relations with pretty girls, how nice..."

And so, the five high school first years have gathered.

The one who proposed entering the amateur indoor soccer tournament was Rui.

With great aptitude for sports, he not only excelled in baseball but also displayed outstanding talent in soccer and basketball. After graduating from middle school, he switched to indoor soccer .

By the way, for some unknown reason, Nakayama choose to join the fishing club in high school.

Other than Rui, everyone else was essentially a newbie. The opposing teams were mostly composed of university students and those who have entered the workforce, as well as former soccer players, so the level of competition was quite high.

Before the five participating teams started the tournament, Erica announced:

"Your jobs will be to defend and gain possession, then pass the ball to me. I will then score. Understood?"

Another delivery of grandiloquence.

Teammate Miura was very angry, Rui simply forced a smile, while Nakayama was happy for some reason.

Even though Godou insisted that teamwork was very important , Erica ignored him. Usually this would have been fatal, but with these teammates, they ended up winning repeatedly and obtaining second place.

Truly, the athletic ability of all the team members was nothing to sneeze at.

Erica required no explanation, while the remainder were all strong healthy youths and official athletes. They were all highly selected elites gathered together, and most importantly, they were young and vigorous.

As matches reached the latter half, those in the workforce who lacked regular exercise had to stop running.

And so, the tournament lasted from nine in the morning to one in the afternoon.

...In a corner of the public sports ground, Godou was merrily chatting with his old friends when his shirt collar was grabbed from behind.

"Hey, Godou, fun time is over. Do you really think you can just put me aside? What you should do next is take your beautiful lover on a date, right?"

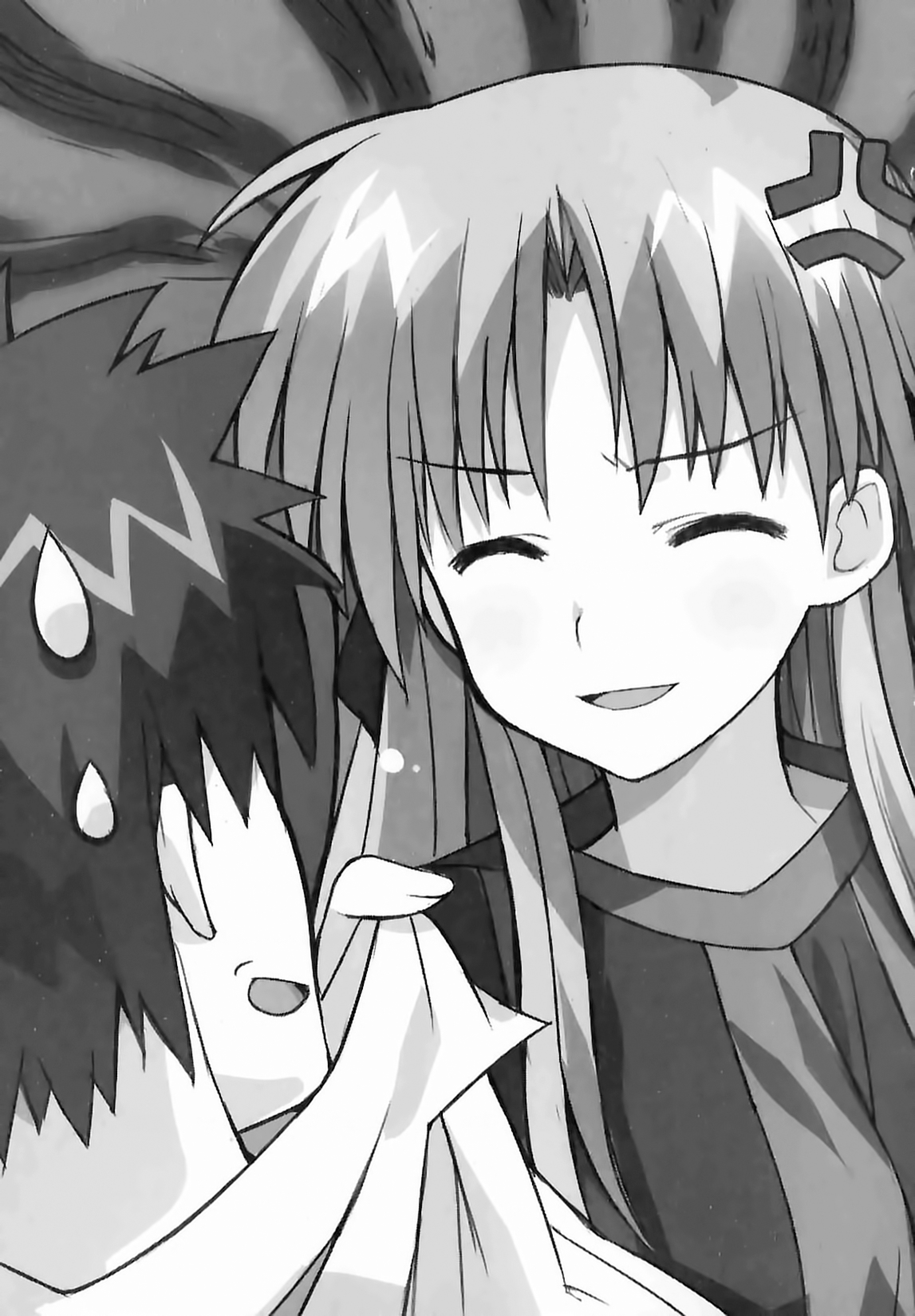
Erica had returned at some point after going off to take a shower.

"Hey, you have to watch the situation. My friends are here, so..."

Not only was her attitude dismal, but fire also seemed to be emanating from her eyes.

Godou felt himself huddling in fear. Erica's imposing presence was currently most frightening.

"Then let us lay out everything on the table. Who is at fault from the start? You? Or me? My mood is terrible, so please give me a swift and correct answer."



"S-should be me... right?"

"Remove the 'should' and the 'right?', there is no one else but you."

Erica's words were sharp and incisive, and Godou shrank back as he realized his error.

"But you are fortunate, for I, Erica Blandelli, possess the virtue of generosity and forgiveness. As long as you show contrition, I will not hesitate to present my love as a gift to you, how's that?"

"T-Then—what should I do now—"

As he tried hard to turn his head, he found Erica glaring at him.

Godou panicked. If this was baseball—no, no matter what kind of competition, or even a battle against a god or a devil king, he will always find a way!

Unable to bear the heavy atmosphere, Rui tried to lighten the situation.

"Ok, you don't have to mind us any longer, Kusanagi. Why don't you and Erica-san go for lunch now, just the two of you!"

"Eh, how can we let Kusanagi be alone with his girlfriend! I will not allow it!"

"Nakayama, I leave Miura in your care."

"Yes, just do your part and don't mess things up."

Following Rui's directions, Nakayama immediately reached out his hands and covered Miura's mouth from behind. Unable to form words, Miura could only roar. Satisfied, the former second baseman happily said:

"Quick, leave while the coast is clear. Goodbye, Kusanagi-san."

"Ah, yes. Sorry... then let's go, Erica."

As his three old friends watched them go, Godou left the sports ground with Erica.

Part 2

Finally, Godou had a chance to be alone with Erica for the first time that day.

In any case, he decided to walk towards the main streets with lots of shops.

"Godou, my love for you has never changed, but that is simply not enough to suppress the vortex of anger swirling in my heart, please take a little care in the activities from here on, okay?"

"Has what I've done really been so terrible...?"

"If you have something to say, then speak out clearly. If you want to know exactly where you have messed up, I can grade each of your actions starting from yesterday."

"Spare me. It's all my fault, okay. But please don't take out your anger on my friends."

"If this were the second or the third date, then no matter how displeased I felt, I would still treat them as guests with utmost politeness. However today is an exception and I will not tolerate it. "

Angrily finishing her words, Erica shifted her gaze away from Godou.

"A first date is a rare event, and clearly a day to commemorate. You truly are dense and completely failed to understand how I feel !"

Godou surrendered. To think Erica would express her feelings with such forthright honesty.

Her face that had turned away in anger perhaps carried a bit of shyness.

"Yes, yes it's my fault. I will try to improve in the future. Please don't be angry, be happy."

"It's fine, you don't have to apologize. Actually, I expected nothing from you from the very beginning!"

Erica's tone was still very critical, and Godou tried very hard to emphasize he was reflecting on his actions. He spent over twenty minutes trying to placate her.

Her anger finally subsided, they decided to find a place to eat.

"Arianna originally said she could prepare lunchboxes for us—"

Erica mentioned the name of her live-in assistant and maid.

"But since we often eat her lunches at school, I told her not to, as it is rare enough for us to go out on a date."

"Yes, and I would feel bad asking her to make lunch on a holiday."

"Perhaps it would be better if I made something for you personally?"

To Erica's suggestion, Godou immediately shook his head.

"That thought has never crossed my mind."

It is rumored that Erica's only cooking experience was boiling water for instant noodles.

This wise, capable, and universally talented girl was in essence, an even more sheltered high-class young lady than Yuri was. Uh, probably best to just call her a princess or a queen.

To imagine Erica toiling in the kitchen with her unpolished cooking skills, perhaps such a scene might make one smile, but it definitely did not suit this girl.

Rather than watch Erica suffer doing something she was not good at, Godou preferred seeing her surrounded by glory and prestige like a princess.

"Is that so? But being described that way does not make me happy."

"Everyone is different, isn't that for the best? Anyway, what do you want to eat?"

Since they have arrived in an area with many different restaurants, Godou sought her opinion.

A Tokyo native and a Milanese, there was probably no commonality in their eating preferences, but fortunately neither of them were picky eaters, and any choice would have satisfied them both.

"Let's go to that Chinese restaurant first? A safe bet."

Right in front of their eyes, was a tiny Chinese restaurant.

Ethnic Chinese were present in every country of the world, and, of course, Italy was no exception. While staying there, the two of them had often visited Chinese restaurants.

"I don't really want to. I visited a similar shop a few days ago."

"In that case, which one should we pick..."

"Trying something Japanese occasionally would be nice, how about sushi and tempura?"

In truth, Erica's understanding of Japanese culture was nowhere as advanced as her mastery of the Japanese language.

Once you realize that she has merely spent three months in this country, too much cannot be expected from her. However, her unfamiliarity with Japanese culture seemed rather odd in light of her ability to converse with others in perfect Japanese.

But to pick those two things out of everything else, Godou could only laugh awkwardly as he surveyed the surroundings.

"It's actually a bit unsuitable for high school students to be eating those types of food. I don't know where you want to go, but I'm kind of against it... However, if it's that kind of shop, I can still accept..."

Discovering a rotary sushi franchise, Godou made a suggestion but Erica refused.

"Though I have no idea how well that shop is rated, I don't want to eat there. How should I put it? The server uniform looks smelly and the shop gives an impression of zero individuality. In my opinion, wasting time in that kind of shop would be even worse than having to endure poor cuisine. Let's not go there."

Without even checking out the decor inside the shop, she had already made up her mind with a single glance from the outside.

Erica's value system was rather peculiar. Compared to fast food or family restaurants that were small and clean, but lacking in distinctive style, she preferred eating at roadside stalls or messy and dirty little shops.

Caring neither for taste, appearance nor comfort, but deciding where she went based on 'level of interest.'

The fact that she depended heavily on the slightly problematic Arianna, was probably due to the same reason. Godou was once again reminded of her unique tastes.

"Let's go there then, it is Japanese and should probably have what you like to eat."

"I see, it feels okay, but I can't tell what this shop is selling."

It was an Osaka-style okonomiyaki[29] shop with a quiet atmosphere.

Opened since the middle of the Shouwa period in the twentieth century, the shop gave off a sense of cleanliness. Godou and Erica passed through the curtains and entered the door.

Out from the kitchen came a middle-aged woman, who led them to their seats in the hall. There were no other customers.

"...Iron plate?"[30]

It goes without saying that Erica was not kneeling on the tatami, but sitting slanted.

Seeing the large iron plate unique to this kind of restaurant, Erica tilted her head incredulously.

"Using this metal plate, you fry things to eat yourself."

"Ah, it's a self-served restaurant. Then let's hurry and start."

"The fire was just lit, and the iron plate hasn't heated up yet, you can't start even if you wanted to."

The two first chatted as they waited for the food to arrive.

Their orders were the two specialties innovated by this restaurant—the assorted pancake and the pork pancake.

Of course, Godou was not some kind of optimist, and he never expected Erica to start frying the pancakes herself, so he placed the ingredients on the iron plate, adjusted the shape, then repeated frying until it was done, and finally added the condiments.

"Ah, I never knew you could cook so well, this gives me a bit of a surprise."

Erica praised Godou as she ate the assorted pancake that had been divided into several slices.

"Simply spreading out ingredients to fry can't really be considered cooking. At most, it's just imitating how others do it."

"Really? ...Then let me try."

"If you are serious, I won't stop you... But you sure you're fine?"

The results proved that Godou's worries were redundant.

Though all she did was watch from the side, Erica's frying skills were actually not bad at all.

Furthermore, she made delicious fried noodles just by following Godou's verbal instructions, and she even successfully fried the monjayaki[31], a supposedly difficult task for novices.

"Godou, you are truly fortunate. To this day, there has been no one else who has eaten cuisine I personally prepared... not even grandfather. You must savor this from the bottom of your heart."

"I am truly thankful for this meal you have prepared... But really, when you put your mind to it, you really can do it quite well..."

Godou marveled at Erica's talent as he used his chopsticks to pick up the food.

But then again, for such a small task as frying a pancake, one could hardly feel her earnest effort. Truly, it was very much in her style.

Just like a queen bestowing rewards upon a subject, or a princess allowing a knight to kiss her hand, Erica watched with such an expression as Godou ate.

"However, cooking once in a while feels quite nice. If you don't mind, I will do it again. Just for Godou, I will personally cook."

"Uh, sure if another chance comes along, thank you for your efforts..."

"Ah, that tone of voice doesn't sound too confident. You've already witnessed my talent just now, right?"

"I know you are very capable, but if you suddenly have the impulse to make something 'that seems very interesting' and end up creating something like Anna's cooking, then my stomach is in peril."

"The way you put it, really sounds interesting..."

"Which is exactly what I'm saying, don't go making those strange creations!"

Anna was, in other words, Arianna. In the field of cooking, she was a woman who could reach world-class levels of innovation. The two of them finished their meal with Anna as the topic of conversation.

Erica mentioned that she had something to do at Ueno, so the two of them set forth.

Due to Godou's strong protests against taking a taxi, they took the streetcar to their destination instead.

"What you meant by something to do, couldn't be shopping, right?"

"Correct, I want to buy a few articles of western clothing."

Having the experience of being dragged off by his sister to accompany her shopping, Godou began to review his options for killing boredom, but he was greatly surprised when they reached their destination.

"T-This is not a clothing store! I-It's an underwear store!?"

"Broadly speaking, this also falls under western clothing. Godou, don't be so hung up on these minor details."

Located in one of the high-class department stores in Ueno was an underwear store on the floor specializing in female fashion.

All sorts of different mini articles of clothing (cannot describe them in too much detail) laid out in rows, or swirling like a vortex into a small hill, or forming their own universe like a mandala.[32]

Erica smiled at Godou who was just about to get up and bolt for the door.

"I need your preference as a basis for judgment. So why don't you start, tell me which style you'd like me to try?"

"Any style will do, after all there's no difference!"

"To say something like that, you are really hopeless. One day I will have you strip them off personally, isn't that right? I believe they have to be chosen with care."

"S-Strip off—!?"

Godou was silent, for her to say something so bold in such a place.

And while they were conversing, the saleslady (looks about twenty-something, and quite pretty too) must have heard!

The saleslady returned a polite smile when he stole a glance at her.

Unlike the so-called professional smile, this was the kind of smile that seemed to say 'ah, these kids are so young.'

"Anyway, why do you have to come to this kind of store, they must sell underwear near where you live?"

"You won't be able to buy imports unless you come to this part of town. Though the ones made in Japan have great quality and the designs are rather cute, they don't really match my image. What do you think of this one?"

Erica pointed at a pair of white panties sewn with plenty of lace.

A cutting applied to the nonessential portions of the fabric created a light fluttery feeling. It exuded an air of regal, extraordinarily upper class taste and achieved a fully glamorous effect.

It really did suit Erica very well... no no.

Godou forcefully shook his head and dispelled this frivolous thought.

"That piece was imported from France, truly excellent."

The saleslady from just now chose a perfect opportunity to chime in.

"If you like it, why don't you try it out?"

"I see. Then I will. So Godou, I want your opinion, accompany me to the changing room and let me listen to your thoughts."

"W-Who would agree to such a thing?"

Erica ended up trying a whole stack, and decided to buy them all.

She settled the bill by credit card and arranged for the merchandise to be delivered to her home.

Despite seeing her shop frequently, Godou still could not get used to Erica squandering money like this. Leaving the store helped lighten his mood a lot.

"Your mission has not ended. Can you go over there with me?"

Erica spoke to Godou whose mood had turned for the better.

The two of them left the department store and entered the crowd.

As expected of the Ueno area on a holiday, it was very lively.

Leaving behind the JR train station and the Ameyoko market street, Erica made her way towards nearby Yushima with Godou trailing after her.

Choosing her path without a shred of hesitation, it seemed like she has fully accustomed herself to the geography of Tokyo.

That was Erica. Even though she was not well-versed in traditional Japanese culture or the customs and habits of ordinary people, she had mastered the geography around Tokyo and all other places related to either her organization or her own personal activities.

Entering a residential neighborhood near Ueno and following an uphill slope, Godou was apparently taken to the outskirts of a cluster of shady-looking love motels.

Part 3

Godou fell silent, what on earth were Erica's intentions!?

"Erica, wait a moment first. What are you planning next?"

"Hmm, what am I doing... Preparing to resolve the conflict that arose recently."

Godou felt greatly shaken.

Speaking of conflict resolution, did she mean clarifying their ambiguous relationship in a decisive manner?

—How do you truly feel about me? Today you must give a straight answer.

—This time I will not allow you to dodge the issue like usual, please show some manliness now, and demonstrate clearly with your words and attitude.

Godou feared that Erica would catch him unaware with such lines, and wracked his brain preparing responses.

Was he truly cornered this time...?

"What is it, Godou? Your face looks like you have a stomach ache, are you unwell?"

Erica noticed his odd behavior and questioned.

This woman had the attractive exterior of a devil, the strong will to materialize her wishes, the overwhelming charisma that was impossible to resist, and, in this kind of situation, an unbelievable power that exceeded normal parameters.

However, in reality she was just looking at Godou with an incredulous expression.

"You ask me why? Think about it, this place, how should I put it ..."

"This place? Is there a problem with this place? However, I did notice a number of strange buildings."

"Eh...?"

"Come to think of it, the map did indicate motels here, but I don't see any reason to run such businesses in this dismal neighborhood, right? And the buildings are so unfashionable, though they are quite interesting in their own way."

Erica responded in casual tones.

Could it be that Erica... she didn't know that motels had that kind of connotation...?

That's right, she is completely unaware. Truly the young mistress of the Blandelli family! Having reached this conclusion, Godou felt as if a heavy load had been lifted off his back. Great, there was still plenty of buffer time until the ultimate situation will be reached.

"You don't look too well? If you don't mind, perhaps we could rent a room around here to take a rest?"

"No no, I'm fine. Continue onwards! Anyway, where are you going?"

Godou responded loudly, and Erica suspiciously stared at Godou as she pointed to the shrine in front of them.

"That's the place, let's enter."

Before the row of motels was a little shrine.

A quiet place completely different from the nearby Yushima Seidou or Kanda Shrine.

A plaque with the name Tamaura Shrine hung on the entrance torii.

The kannushi[33] was not there and no one seemed to be there. After surveying the surroundings, Erica pushed open the door of the front hall with her hand. Apparently the door was not locked.

"How careless. But even if they forgot to lock the door, we can't go in so casually."

"Originally I was just planning on surveying the outside, but it turns out no one is here... No problem, after all this is a public shrine anyway."

Walking into the front hall as they spoke, they were surprised to find signs of habitation in the shrine.

This was easily concluded from the neatly arranged objects in the corner.

Sleeping bag, many magazines and manga, dried bread and fruit and other nonperishable food—these were all piled up in an organized manner, but their presence conspicuously clashed with the shrine surroundings.

Erica glanced at these items in the front hall and softly spoke in deep thought.

"Nothing that can be used as a clue... what a waste of time."

"Come on, behave, what you're doing right now is against the law."

After some nagging from Godou, the Italian-born beauty finally left the premises.

However, she immediately said:

"This place yielded nothing useful, let's hurry to the next destination."

Hastened by Erica to the next place to visit, Godou was shocked once again. It turned out to be the high school section of Jounan Academy, the school that they attended.

"I think Godou's instincts are very good."

Erica praised him as they walked in the sports ground on this holiday.

There were members of sports clubs engaged in activities on the field, but the rest of the school was very quiet.

"I think it's very bad actually... since I'm often labeled dense and slow."

Just a couple of hours ago, he had been scolded severely by this girl.

However, the other party, Erica, simply went "hmph" and made a gesture ridiculing him.

"That only applies to the way you treat women. What I referred to just now, were your instincts towards supernatural phenomenon such as magic and divinities. Basically, you have acute instincts towards danger just like a wild beast, that's true right?"

Now that she put it that way, it did feel likely to be true.

After becoming a Campione, it was as if Godou had gained a sixth sense that sometimes made him aware of things that he could not possibly know about. But why bring this ability up right now?

"Since I am expecting results from Godou's instincts, I have a question for you. My sources told me that someone has done something unusual to the school, probably some sort of spell. Do you sense any signs of tampering?"

"No, I feel nothing..."

Godou tried to survey Jounan Academy's school buildings, sports ground, and foundations, but could not sense anything.

The only feeling obtained was the sense of emptiness from the lack of students on a weekend.

"You need to be more serious. Concentrate and let your senses become clearer. If you try that, your spirit vision might even end up having a higher success rate than Lily."

"Uh, how could that be possible? I don't have any spirit vision to begin with."

Godou thought back at Liliana's abilities as both a knight and a witch.

In the battle against Perseus, he had witnessed her spirit vision, and then Mariya has also shown him the powers of spirit vision many times. He clearly did not possess it.

"Spirit vision refers to the ability to extract [Memories of the Void] from the [Boundary of Life and Immortality] in the Astral Plane. The reason why you often display extraordinary instincts could possibly be due to the Campione's sixth sense peering into the Astral Plane."

Erica's words led Godou to think back to a certain buried memory.

The [Boundary of Life and Immortality], it seemed vaguely familiar. But [Memories of the Void] and such stuff were totally incomprehensible, so Godou decided to just forget about it.

"Perhaps using that ability, you can obtain something that approaches spirit vision. Try again... Also, perhaps Yuri's example has misled you, but even for European witches, obtaining spirit vision is extremely difficult."

"Is that so? But didn't Liliana say that she had spirit vision as well?"

"That is correct, but the crux of the matter is the success rate. The chance for a witch to successfully activate spirit vision effectively is at best ten percent, but from my estimates Yuri definitely exceeds sixty percent."

"How can it differ by so much!"

"Yes, if a situation required spirit vision from witches, usually they would gather dozens of them so that the overall success rate is raised through quantity."

Godou finally got the point. Come to think of it, Liliana did explain to him during the battle against Perseus, that it was the grace of Athena that allowed her to obtain spirit vision abilities that surpassed her previous level.

Now Godou finally understood the reason why Erica has been so preoccupied with Yuri ever since the first time they met.

"Why don't you ask Mariya for help?"

"Think about why I can't do that? This has political implications. "

"When you said someone... Could it be a member of that whatever Committee?"

"Wrong, this time the Committee is the side trying to hinder her , but they cannot help but acquiesce to her actions with frustration—can you understand?"

"A woman... then it's Seishuuin Ena, looks like Yuri and the rest will have lots of trouble."

Finally understanding after much explanation... hearing Godou's exclamation, Erica shrugged her shoulders.

"Lily and I can still act independently, even if we lose support from the magic associations of our home country, it won't be a huge problem... But if you look at the girls around Godou from this perspective, then Yuri's situation is the most delicate. You have to be more observant of these things."

"Yes yes, I get it."

Failing to pay attention in those areas, this was something that needed to be improved. As Godou thought, he decided to answer Erica's request.

In order to look for anything out of the ordinary, Godou ran throughout the school.

"...Uh, nothing strange was found."

"Still didn't work, seems like you're no good for anything outside of battle."

Hearing his simple report, Erica was exasperated.

Godou felt the same way. Even though his instincts were very good, they only seemed to work in the heat of battle.

During battle, in the instant when his instincts kicked in, there was always a feeling like sparks exploding.

Godou tried focusing his eyes on the school walls.

I hate this place. Such a thought flowed into his mind. Enemy, to be more precise, he could feel the presence of the enemy floating around.

"I found a bad feeling around this area, but other than that, nothing."

"This wall? Perhaps some kind of barrier was erected?"

Erica and Godou began a serious discussion in front of the wall of the school building.

However, the answer to their questions came from an unexpected direction.

"That isn't a barrier, but I won't go into the details. Ama no Murakumo and I did a little tinkering there, but not just in one location."

The two turned to look behind.

Seishuuin Ena was approaching from the opposite side of the sports ground.

Wearing her uniform despite being the weekend, with the familiar long and narrow bag slung over her shoulder.

"'The many-fenced place of Izumo / Of the many clouds rising—To dwell there with my spouse / Do I build a many-fenced palace: Ah, that many-fenced palace!' Have you heard of this? This is the enchanted song of Susanoo, the one I inscribed on eight different places when I infiltrated the school many days ago. I knew it would come in handy eventually."

The friendly Yamato Nadeshiko, innocent and forthcoming.

Though she looked the same as usual, Godou sensed something strange.

"I came to inspect them today. If they didn't take effect in a crisis, I would be very troubled. But why are you two here? Aren't you supposed to be on a date?"

Her tone becoming sharp, Ena turned her gaze to Erica. The girl known as the [Diavolo Rosso], answered with a polite smile.

"We are on a date right now, but we just decided to investigate Ena-san's prepared pranks on the way, that's all."

"Really, then I'm sorry. Have I disturbed you two?"

Though it sounded like a calm conversation, an unfriendly atmosphere seemed to be hanging between the two of them. Godou frowned.

"I don't know what conflict exists between the two of you, but could you two not cause any strange commotions?"

"Understood, hubby... though that's how I want to address you, it turns out to be really difficult."

Ena let down the bag from her shoulder, and opened it dexterously with one hand.

"Other than declaring myself to be Kusanagi-san's woman, I have one other goal."

"Goal?"

"Eliminating me, most likely."

Erica spoke in a sarcastic tone. The Hime-Miko showed a "that's right" expression and smiled.

An expression not seen previously, it was a wild grin that belonged to a carnivore in the middle of a hunt.

"Kusanagi-san is a super important person, so it is no good allowing a foreign lady to hang around him all the time. That's what the people back home say. Hoho, though it's fine for me either way, but..."

The bag fell to the ground, and the sheathed sword was revealed.

"If this mission must be accomplished, there's no way around it. And hearing that the opponent is an Italian knight has gained Ena's interest. At the same time, grampsy has also felt amused by the surprise."

"Grampsy? The one who bestowed the divine sword on you?"

Erica planned to elucidate the detailed situation at that time.

"What detailed knowledge, as expected of Erica-san. Yes, grampsy can be quite a terrifying person. Let alone the Hime-Miko , even the History Compilation Committee members have to fearfully cater to his mood."

Ena drew the sword from its sheath.

The blade was infused with a sacred silvery white light, full of imperial splendor.

Godou and Erica exchanged glances in response to the emerging crisis.

(Let me handle her first while you observe for now. If you used your authority, it would probably kill her.)

(Uh, that's right... but don't go too far.)

Godou felt uneasy, but decided to leave things to Erica for now.

The special powers usurped from Verethragna's authority included monstrous strength, super speed, lightning, solar fire, and others... A multitude of powerful abilities, but none of them were suitable for dealing with a normal human.

Unless the enemy was an immortal god, Godou would not want to activate his authority.

Once Godou stepped back, Erica summoned Cuore di Leone in her hand.

The sword with the narrow blade that gave off a chilling brightness.

Watching the red and black knight enter a stance, Ena happily declared:

"Since Yuri won't be at school on the weekends, I don't need to be mindful of her. Having Kusanagi-san present is a bit troublesome, but I've already made preparations to handle him, so let's determine the victor right here!"

Having spoken, she kicked the ground once.

With wide strides, Ena made a thrust with her magnificent sword.

Jumping to the side to evade the attack, Erica countered with a thrust from Cuore di Leone. However, Ena dodged by lightly twisting her body like a bat.

Erica glared with sharp eyes while Ena stared back savagely.

In the next instant, their swords began to clash intensely.

Erica brandished the lightweight Cuore di Leone, thrusting continuously without pause.

A series of attacks like a hail of bullets.

But Ena parried all attacks by lightly waving the blade of her sword in a left-right motion.

Her sword should be far longer and heavier than the magic sword of the lion.

In spite of that, Ena displayed perfect defense and could even counterattack while she focused her attention on the blonde female knight's attacks.

Erica skillfully defended Ena's return strikes, but always in the nick of time.

Godou never expected to find a girl from Japan who could match Erica in swordsmanship!

Surprised by the unexpected revelations, Godou desperately tried to come up with a plan.

By the time his thoughts returned to the battle, both combatants' attacks had become more and more intense.

If this continued, it would likely end with one side heavily injured. How could their fight be interrupted? He did not have any weapons and cannot use his authority. Then as a man, he was down to one weapon.

"Damn it, after all I probably can't die, so let's take a gamble!"

Godou possessed the [Ram] incarnation which allowed him to revive from near death injuries, but was useless if he died instantaneously. Ignoring his rational mind, Godou told himself "I won't die as long as I'm lucky' and sprang into action.

Erica and Ena continued to exchange attacks fiercely.

Godou used his own body to block the space in between their swinging swords.

"—Godou!?" "—Kusanagi-san!?"

Erica and Ena put away their weapons simultaneously, and prevented a tragedy at the last instant.

If either of them had been slightly lacking in reflexes, judgment, or swordsmanship, then Godou would have been sliced apart.

"Godou, what are you doing! There are limits to stupidity!"

"I had no other way. Other than this, I couldn't think of another method to stop you two..."

To Erica who seldom lost her composure, Godou answered with his trembling body.

Regardless, he narrowly missed death and the battle was halted. In terms of results, his decision was correct.

"Y-you shouldn't be so reckless, but now I understand, it's something like that."

Ena seemed to have confirmed something. Understand? What did she understand?

"In order to make Yuri, who is slow to warm up to others, fall for you, I've always suspected that you must have great manliness somewhere. As expected, it's that cliché? 'To protect the woman I love, I can give my life' kind of deal?"

"Nothing like that. I didn't fully consider before I acted... Also, I was trying to protect you too."

Godou's denial made Seishuuin Ena go 'eh?' with doubt.

"Not only Erica, I also don't want to see Seishuuin get hurt. Anyway, to resolve conflicts with swords is not right. You should have a good discussion to find a peaceful solution."

"Really? So I have already been added to your list of 'my women?' Aw shucks, how embarrassing..."

"No way! How can anyone do nothing when they see someone about to be sliced to death!"

Watching the Hime-Miko getting a little shy, Godou protested strongly.

But she was unaffected, and continued to speak complacently.

"Looks like as long as Kusanagi-san is present, we can't fight properly. Then I will heed grampsy's advice, and use that move..."

Ena who had been holding the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi with both hands, let go of the blade with her left and reached into her pocket.

What she took out was a cellphone.

"Oh by the way, I'm not making a phone-call, it's just a habit. In order to speak with the other world, this is necessary for the dialogue to succeed—grampsy, even though this happened earlier than planned, but please use that move."

As she spoke softly into the cellphone, Godou and Erica became suspicious, but Ena immediately threw down the phone.

The sky immediately became dark and the surroundings became dominated by darkness.

Thinking it might be cloud cover, Godou looked up and was quite shocked.

The sun in the sky was entirely darkened, and around the black circle was a white corona. It was almost like a solar eclipse!

Then strong winds began to blow.

Cold winds that seemed strong enough to blow an entire body away and cut open skin.

"Whoever is swiftest among the boatmen of the Uji ferry will come to me.[34] God whom I worshipped, exists no longer! If you believe god once existed, sacrifice well![35]"

Within the world sealed away by darkness, Ena chanted the incantation in a loud voice.

To Godou, the spell words carried by the chant felt like they were tearing up the world, and his body was filled with vigor and battle spirit. Was it a god? Was a god coming here?

Godou stared at the wall just now.

In that corner, an enemy's presence could be felt slightly.

Massive amounts of divine power were being released, and the same energy could be felt from seven other locations within the school.

"Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, is the divine blade used by Susanoo and Yamato Takeru... these two heroes. However, they were not only warriors who tamed their enemies by force but also highly intelligent heroes who employed deception when necessary . In other words, capricious and ever-changing gods of deceit and thievery. Especially Susanoo, he was a god who even tricked and covered up the sun itself. Even for you, Your Majesty, there is no way to escape this trap!"

Ena spoke in a solemn voice for the first time.

Erica tried to prevent the unpredictable outcome by slashing at the Hime-Miko.

However, it was too late and the land beneath Godou's feet had turned into darkness.

The original concrete became completely jet-black in color.

"U-Uwaaaaaaaaaah!?"

His body and limbs sank and disappeared into the darkness.

Godou yelled as he resisted with all his might, but even as he thrashed his arms and legs there was nothing for him to grab or kick.

The result was being swallowed by the void black space.

Godou fell into the darkness and vanished completely.

In that instant, Erica wielded Cuore di Leone and slashed at Ena with all her strength.

But it was blocked by the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

As the magic sword of the lion and the divine sword pressed against each other, the two girls began to argue.

"Where did you send Godou away to!?"

"I don't know either, because the one who did it was grampsy."

Ena responded to Erica who had discarded her usual elegant composure.

Come to think of it, what the Hime-Miko just said.

The god of trickery and deceit. The ever-changing god. The god of thievery—in other words these identities are all con artists! Erica recalled the [Secret Tome of Prometheus] that could steal divine powers. Possessing the same qualities—but with a mysterious power many times greater than the grimoire, Godou was taken away!

"I think His Majesty should now be in the Netherworld, and grampsy isn't going to release him back to the real world."

"The Netherworld? Could it be the Astral Plane—the Boundary of Life and Immortality!?"

"Ah, so it is also called that? I think the Committee members would be more knowledgeable in these areas."

Erica shuddered as she watched the Hime-Miko who casually answered her questions.

One who freely employed a divine artifact that ordinary mortals were unable to use.

One who communicated with supernatural existences living in the Boundary of Life and Immortality.

"It looks like amongst the Hime-Miko, there are quite a few girls possessing extraordinary dispositions."

"Yes. Ena can hear the voice of god, and can borrow god's power slightly. If I explain it this way, I believe Erica-san can understand?"

A user of divine possession! Erica was speechless.

A miko that possessed such a disposition was even rarer than one who had spirit vision. If the Hime-Miko were able to recruit into its ranks someone with such legendary powers, they must be an unimaginably troublesome organization.

Ena seemed to have tired of answering questions and jumped away from the state of pointing their blades at each other.

"Perhaps due to being connected to grampsy, some spirits from that side have filtered over..."

Ena was muttering, and straightened her arm, pointing Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi forward.

This resulted in the sword altering its form.

From a straight sword, it slowly turned into a curved blade.

The originally sacred white light from the blade turned black, and the body of the blade appeared to be burning with black flames—a form that seemed to herald catastrophe.

"Did you know? The ones who brought the technique of forging curved blades to this country were barbarian sword-smiths seen as enemies by the government."

Ena spoke softly.

Like the dark and icy cold wind blowing across execution grounds.

"If the blade is curved, slicing power will be increased. The forging techniques of the Ezo[36] sword-smiths were inherited by the craftsmen of Oshu, and from there actively promoted to the rest of the country... Absorbing the slaughtered barbarian power for its own use, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi also possesses this characteristic."

Holding the jet-black divine sword, Ena's face revealed a frightening smile.

Rather than a miko serving god, it was more like the belligerent face of a ghost of the sword.

"Assimilating the rebellious barbarian power for its own use—the sword of conquest, that is Ena's partner, come let us duel! "

Erica took a deep breath.

She could feel Ena's magical power disappearing from her body .

In order to perform powerful magic or use an authority's killing move, most magi and Campiones will raise their magical power to the maximum. Erica has witnessed it many times already.

But Ena was doing the opposite. Her power and presence was approaching zero—almost as if she no longer existed.

And entering the vessel of the Hime-Miko, was a solemn divine presence.

"So which one is your grampsy, may I ask one more time?"

"Uh? What do you mean by which one?"

Erica asked the surprised Ena once again.

"You just mentioned, right? There are two gods who possess this divine sword, Susanoo and Yamato Takeru. So the grampsy you keep mentioning, which one is he?"

"It's Susanoo! But everyone calls him this unbecoming nickname , the Old One!"

The storm god of conquest who held the attribute of steel.

Protected by that kind of deity, a user of the legendary divine sword would be a formidable foe indeed. Erica anxiously looked at the spot where Godou disappeared.

The jet-black darkness continued to swirl upon the surface of the ground.

It was the deep darkness that swallowed the young Campione that she loved.

At this moment, a rash idea entered her heart, but she believed there was value in taking the challenge. What made the [Diavolo Rosso] steel her determination was that once the darkness disappeared, so will all clues to track him down.

One of Erica's tenets was to avoid, as much as possible, battles she was unlikely to win.

If she were to escape now, she will definitely regret it afterwards. Her decision was made the instant she thought that.

Erica also jumped into the darkness that swallowed Godou.

"Uh, you really did that. Very amazing! But I won't let you escape!"

What on earth is this woman? Erica was speechless.

Seeing her jump in, Ena also followed immediately.

And so, the two girls jumped into the mysterious space that captured the Campione.

Chapter 6 - Encounter in the Netherworld

Part 1

Godou found himself in a mountain at some unknown location.

After being swallowed by the suspicious darkness, he came to find himself in this place.

It was deep in the mountains, with lush greenery.

Heavy was the smell of soil and trees. There was also a small stream flowing beside him.

Were it a sunny day, taking a walk here would have been very comfortable. Regrettably, it was raining with massive droplets splattering all over him.

Howling winds filled the sky and mercilessly stole warmth from his drenched body.

In addition, Godou's bodily condition was not very well at this time.

A strong feeling of nausea, terrible cold, and headache made Godou worry if he had caught a flu.

Though it would have been best to get moving to find shelter from this storm, he did not have the strength. Squatting down for about three minutes and enduring the sense of nausea, he felt much better.

"This feeling is almost like carsickness..."

The headache was still present but was not a problem. Godou got up and looked around. The water in the stream beside him was very turbid and flowing rapidly due to the drainage of the rainwater. From the way the stream ran, this place must be quite remote in the deep mountains.

Godou discovered a little house upstream, and started making his way towards it.

He should first find shelter from the rain. Though a wooden house on the riverbank in such pouring rain did not seem particularly safe, it would still be better than standing outside.

Then again, the safety of Erica and Seishuuin Ena still worried him very much.

While worrying about them, Godou reached the door of the little house.

It resembled a rustic wooden house from some historical drama. A simple glance was sufficient to assert that modern amenities such as electricity, gas, and running water were alien concepts.

The sliding door at the entrance was open, and Godou peered inside.

An old man, who appeared to be the owner, sat cross-legged in front of the stove.

His towering physique would stand over 180cm tall. His coarse kimono exposed a strongly built body that did not match his age and bulging musculature that would put most bodybuilders to shame.

The old man's obstinate expression matched his solid build quite well.

"Kusanagi Godou, please enter. My apologies for suddenly summoning you to this place."

To be named so abruptly.

By this point, Godou knew who he was.

Godou's body, charged full of energy to fight, had already given him the answer—the old man before him was a god.

"My miko made trouble for you, but please endure for a little while longer. I had no choice but to bring you here because that girl said she wanted a duel with the barbaric little lady. After all, they are both female and human, so why don't you let them fight to their hearts' content?"

"...Who are you? And what kind of god are you?"

Hearing the questions, the old man smiled.

Though he appeared to be very strict, he unexpectedly gave off a sense of kindliness and intimacy.

"I am the god known as Haya Susanoo no Mikoto. You may call me the Old One or simply old man, but do not use grampsy. Having one brat Ena calling me such an idiotic nickname is more than enough."

Jumping into the darkness that Godou disappeared into—

Erica finally reached the end to find herself at an unknown riverside.

The distance across the river was not very wide, but the flow was quite rapid and swimming across would be very difficult. However, the water in this river was beautiful and crystal clear.

It gave off a feeling that could not possibly come from a river in the twenty-three wards of Tokyo.

"This really is the Astral Plane... right? Could I have entered the Boundary of Life and Immortality?"

Erica knelt on the ground panting.

The air was very turbid and felt lacking in oxygen no matter how hard you breathed. Very likely, her body was not yet accustomed to this world.

But it could not be helped.

Moving from the surface world to the Astral Plane was [Plane Walking], a type of ultimate, high-difficulty magic that required drinking a precious potion beforehand.

This was medication to activate spirit capabilities and help the body adapt to this otherworldly realm.

This was a world where spirit ranked higher than flesh, and ectoplasm ranked higher than matter.

Magi who had stepped foot in the Astral Plane were extremely rare, because neither the magical ritual to transfer to another world nor the required potion were easy to obtain.

Though it was her first time here, Erica already discerned the truth of this world and started responding accordingly.

First, she raised the magical power in her body to the limit.

Despite the risk of depleting her magical energy, there was no time to hesitate. After dozens of seconds, her symptoms disappeared, and Erica stood up, her breathing back to normal. Then came a voice.

"Erica-san, you are amazing. Already moving about in the Netherworld."

Seishuuin Ena walked over, holding the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in her hand.

The Hime-Miko also seemed to be protecting her body in the same way and did not show any signs of suffering.

"You're really annoying, and I was about to catch up to Godou. Could you kindly step aside?"

"If that's the case, you must first defeat Ena by force. Come, we must hurry and fight."

Erica drew Cuore di Leone for she had harbored the same intentions all along.

Then she advanced to attack Ena who was wielding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in its jet-black curved blade form.

The magic sword and the divine blade clashed once again.

The moment the two blades met, Cuore di Leone was split into two! With split second decisiveness, Erica promptly jumped to the side and evaded the follow up attack.

"Steel of the lion, the symbol of indestructible authority!"

Responding to Erica's spell words, the broken segment of the magic sword flew through the air and returned.

Then combined and welded back together again.

Cuore di Leone restored itself through its attribute of indestructibility, but Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's power was also increasing.

Or rather, it was simply retrieving its original power?

"Susanoo—by filling her body with the blade's original user's divine protection, she is able to wield a divine artifact that humans cannot use... To think that such a technique existed!"

Erica exclaimed softly.

Ena's body was inhabited by some unknown divine power. A tiny fraction of Susanoo's divinity—probably around two hundred parts per million—was being lent to her.

Even though the amount of power a human body could contain was this small, its nature was still the power of a god.

Which is why Ena could freely wield Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi using her own will and sword skills.

"Not just grampsy's power, but this Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi is also similar to a demigod. Its spirit flows within me. Susanoo's attribute as the conquering god was also obtained from the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi."

The steel sword symbolizing the conqueror... Since this description was bestowed after he obtained the sword, Susanoo must have acquired his divinity of the conquering god at the same time, Erica deduced.

"Tell me, that grampsy of yours called Susanoo—where is he? Then again, what is he? Could he be a [Heretic God]?"

"According to his own description, he is no longer the same brash and mischievous god in his youth."

Provoked by Ena's laughter, Erica could not help but glare at her. But she was right, were he still a [Heretic God], he would be wandering on earth and causing mass destruction instead. Then what kind of existence was he actually?

"Explaining it will take very long... And there's no time left, right?"

Ena felt deeply apologetic.

"Normally, I should be more leisurely. But maybe because we're in the Netherworld, the divine power in my body has increased? The spirit of grampsy and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi is truly amazing, even talking properly is becoming impossible... So Ena would like to apologize to you first."

"You want to apologize?"

"Yes, because Ena is now too strong, so strong that even I feel despicable..."

As she made such a declaration, Ena's body began to shake.

Her movements were very stiff, like those of a puppet, and completely different from her agile moves up to this point.

"Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, I pledge this body as a sacrifice, pray calm your wild spirit!"

The spell words were chanted from the miko's mouth.

Whispered words that carried piety and nihility. And inhabiting her pupils was a ferocious fighting spirit and murderous intent.

It was not the eyes of a swordsman who gambled with life to enjoy battle, but those of an evil spirit that swore to defeat all enemies and annihilate them completely.

With her changed expression, Ena raised her jet-black divine sword high using stiff movements.

"Thousand leaves breaking, Iwaki of god, surpassing possible, I now name it, unfortunate nothingness."[37]

The instant the spell song was chanted, Erica received a shocking surprise.

The magical power that protected her and allowed her to adjust to the Netherworld suddenly left her body.

That magical power was being sucked into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi!

—The ability to assimilate the power of rebellious barbarians. It turned out it could be used in this way.

Speechless, Erica sank to her knees, her entire body losing strength and her breathing quickening. She had returned to the state when she first arrived in this world.

In front of Ena, who was under divine possession, it was truly a hopeless and desperate situation.

Part 2

To have the gall to call a god "grampsy" to his face, Ena's courage was beyond imagination.

Godou sighed as he asked:

"I'd like to ask, are you actually a [Heretic God]?"

"No, I'm no longer rebelling. I've tired of that kind of game a long time ago."

"Gods who have escaped the restrictions of their myths, aren't they all [Heretic Gods]?"

Scraps of knowledge that he picked up from Erica before.

But the god who introduced himself as Susanoo(!) simply scoffed in disdain.

"That kind of sloppy categorization is wrong. Normal gods only exist in myths, while only those who escape from legends and walk the earth can be called [Heretic Gods]."

[Heretic God] caused unprecedented disasters simply by existing on earth. This was why the only ones who could oppose them, the Campiones, were revered as devil kings. That was what Godou knew.

"As for me, I was a [Heretic God] once."

Susanoo exhaled deeply, and showed an expression as if reading Godou's mind.

"I wandered the earth for over a thousand years, then got bored and decided to live in seclusion. I suppose I used to be very violent and unreasonable, but personalities tend to mellow with age."

His delinquent-like declaration aside, who could have thought Susanoo was an elderly former [Heretic God]?

This self-introduction stunned Godou with surprise. He had been wondering for quite a while what kind of end existed for gods like Athena, but he never thought a retirement solution like this existed.

"You mentioned living in seclusion, what is that about?"

"Since [Heretic Gods] will not die without a serious cause, they will not return to the myths either. Without any other recourse, they either go to sleep or live secluded in the Netherworld like me. "

"Netherworld?"

"Oh? That's this place right here. You didn't know that? I heard you've been summoned here by your adoptive mother Pandora before."

"No, I had no idea at all."

Godou had some kind of subtle feeling as he shook his head.

The headache that appeared after he arrived at this mountain. An annoying headache that suddenly intensified.

"Hahaha, sorry, it's because I brought you here through abnormal means, so you have been unable to retrieve the memories in the Netherworld. You've probably been having a headache all along, right?"

"Then summing up all that was said just now... Everything happened because of you!"

Godou made an indignant accusation, but the elderly hero god laughed "hoho."

"Yes, I used to do many bad things like locking old sis in a cave, so tricks like hiding or concealing are a piece of cake for me."

What did he mean? Godou felt greatly suspicious.

Whenever he tried to ponder about the true visage of Susanoo, his headache would intensify.

Susanoo was originally a god of the earth from Izumo.

However due to repeatedly amalgamating numerous myths, he transformed into a typical hero god. Storms. Using his divine body that controlled storms as a foundation, he obtained the iron sword from slaying the snake.

The iron sword was the Kusanagi sword, the key to his becoming the conquering god of steel.

At the same time, Susanoo also had the hero attribute of craftily making use of deception, and a great example was the story of forcing his elder sister, the great sun goddess Amaterasu, into a stone cave. The legend of 'hiding/stealing the sun', was a common trickster myth in the Asian Pacific region.

All sorts of knowledge about Susanoo flowed into Godou's mind.

Then Godou felt in his right hand, the reaction of the [Sword] being prepared. He fell silent.

"Ha! As expected of the fellow who obtained the sword of wisdom, just by listening to my story, you were able to forge a weapon!"

All he wanted was to know, but why did it turn out like this?

The spell words to slay Susanoo have been obtained, but his head was hurting like it was about to explode. It was probably impossible to win if he had to fight with this god before him in such conditions.

Godou felt doubt at the unexpected occurrence.

He felt that he was exactly like Verethragna—the original user of this sword.

"W-why is this happening..."

"Because this is the Netherworld, which is different from the reality where you live. This is where everything is recorded, from the birth of the universe to all possible future outcomes. Those who possess the ability can obtain some of these records from this place."

The old god seemed to be undertaking an explanation role.

Godou thought about what he heard before, that the power of spirit vision was the ability to extract [Memories of the Void] from the Boundary of Life and Immortality. So the Netherworld was that kind of territory.

So that was the reason why the environment and the [Warrior]'s power produced some kind of chemical reaction...?

However, his headache was getting worse, and his brain felt like it was burning up.

Very likely, it was the price of performing something similar to spirit vision. This kind of task was probably best left to Yuri, Godou painfully realized.

"Anyway, I must leave this place. Something bad is about to happen to my companion—Erica and your miko Seishuuin Ena, and I must go to them."

"What are you talking about? I called you here precisely to stop you from interfering."

Godou endured his headache as he tried to make a sincere request. The former [Heretic God] laughed heartily.

"Just wait a while longer, why the rush? Should I bring out the alcohol?"

This old bastard, why is he making me wait?

As Godou frowned, he heard another voice.

"Looking for your girlfriends? Hahaha, you really are as lecherous as the rumors."

Unlike Susanoo's steady voice, it was a hoarse sound.

Godou frantically looked in the voice's direction. In a corner of the little house, another character had started sitting there at some unknown point in time.

The one dressed in a monk's black habit did not look human at all. With dry, parched skin and no real flesh, it was as if everything had peeled off.

Resembling the body of a living Buddha or a mummified corpse , the sight made Godou swallow hard.

"To treasure her to such a degree, looks like our efforts to send you a concubine have not gone to waste. Since Susanoo-san's miko was a peculiar person, I originally worried if she might not suit your tastes... Or perhaps, you worry more about that barbarian little lady?"

The black clad figure spoke in tones that hid subtle sarcasm.

Simply bearing superficial politeness, he was clearly a very rebellious person.

"Your Majesty the Rakshasa King[38] would like to see the girls, yes? Please wait a moment."

A third voice. This time it was female.

Godou shifted his gaze towards the voice, opposite to the dried out monk's position.

An otherworldly beauty was sitting in seiza, dressed like a noble princess from the Heian era in a brilliantly colorful juunihitoe[39] style kimono. But where did she come from?

Those pupils of hers were crystal clear like the color of glass. Her hair was a deep flaxen color while her smooth delicate skin resembled polished ivory.

This adorable beauty of hers, resembling a sculpture, surpassed the looks of any modern Japanese.

The princess with pupils of glass was sitting before a basin.

When did this basin, filled with water, appear along with the princess—

"W-Who are you people?"

Godou asked frantically.

Unlike Susanoo, the mummified monk and the princess did not provoke his battle spirit, so they should not be gods... Then the old hero god said to the unsettled Godou:

"This is the Netherworld, a gathering place for those who are neither human nor gods. Especially those gathered here: obsessed fools unable to relinquish their feelings for the real world. We have been dealing with the other side for quite a long time, and have been involved in many affairs."

"Simply put, a bunch of old people watching over the young ones."

The dried out monk in black chimed in.

Though most of the teeth in his mouth had already fallen out, his words were surprisingly clear.

"The wizards in charge of this country are too busy with mundane worldly affairs. So in order to prevent them from becoming sleeping tigers, our duty is to give them reminders from time to time. Sometimes when existences like you pop up, we will also make a few comments."

"...Sleeping tigers?"

As Godou asked, the princess spoke once more.

"Please look this way, Rakshasa King. Your majesty's concubine is here."

Images were appearing in the basin of water before her.

Godou hurried over for a look. The image on the surface of the water showed two girls fighting. Erica Blandelli was wielding Cuore di Leone while Seishuuin Ena swung her great blade.

Ena's sword had changed in appearance. The originally straight blade was now curved and its color had become black.

The duel ended dismally.

Facing Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, Erica suddenly collapsed.

"To think that naughty brat Ena has come to the Netherworld. Fool, if she performs divine possession in such a place, her body will surely be taken by me and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi."

"Divine possession?"

Godou questioned Susanoo's scolding of Ena.

"Correct, that is her power as a Hime-Miko. The ability to turn her body into a vessel for containing a god's divine spirit. But with a single mistake, she will lose her mind and body. Looking at her like this... most likely she has been taken over by our divine spirit."

"A miko with that kind of ability is almost like a demigod. It's too unfortunate for the little lady who battled against her."

Susanoo and the monk in black delivered their commentary without any sense of culpability.

Seeing their attitudes, Godou stood up. It was no longer time for gentle requests.

"Send me there. The faster the better, hurry!"

There was no time to tend to the splitting headache.

Godou forced himself to endure the pain and raised his right arm—the one carrying the [Sword], pointing at Susanoo.

Making clear that he would show no mercy if refused.

Despite Godou's threat, Susanoo simply ignored him and looked bored while the monk in black mocked him and went 'hoho , how amazing.'

"Hahaha, good good. Those little ladies would be delighted if they heard your words. You have not shamed the name of the [King], I am deeply impressed!"

Hearing such insincere praise, Godou glared at the monk.

Godou gnashed his teeth, but currently he did not have an incarnation to defeat this mummified monk.

"Rakshasa King, if Your Majesty imagines the place shown here and makes a wish to be there, it will be done. In a place like the Netherworld, methods of travel are different from the real world."

The princess with the pupils of glass explained humbly.

Godou could not help gazing at her beauty.

Unsure where this beauty came from, Godou lowered his head.

"May Your Majesty's merciful virtues help those girls. That is my humble wish."

"That goes without saying! Thank you very much, it's been a great help!"

Godou immediately thanked her politely.

Strangely enough, it did not feel like she was lying.

It was as if the Campione's supernatural sense of danger informed him... the exact same feeling.

Godou did as she described and imagined the scenery shown on the water surface. The place where the two girls were, where did such a beautiful river flow in the Netherworld?

In the next instant, Godou vanished from the little house.

Because of that, the young Campione did not hear the following conversation.

"That person loves women too much. All it took was the sight of his concubines in a desperate plight to make him lose all composure. Hahaha, looks like he is unlikely to perform above expectations."

"Yes, it's all that brat Ena's fault for coming here and making him believe there was a crisis."

The desiccated monk could not stop laughing to himself, while Susanoo scolded with displeasure.

"It's time we stop using those girls to test the Rakshasa King's disposition. I am starting to feel displeased, Enlightened Master, Old One."

Admonished by the princess with eyes of glass, the two men continued unfazed.

Part 3

Erica watched as Seishuuin Ena slowly approached with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. If this continued, she would be slain. Given her current frail body, what other measures could she take —

Searching in vain with no solution in sight, was it really hopeless?

"Wait, Seishuuin, put your sword away!"

A familiar voice. The figure of the familiar youth appeared between Erica and the Hime-Miko.

Kusanagi Godou. The youth she was determined to save.

"Godou, you're okay...?"

"Well enough, I will handle this. You should rest for a while."

With barely enough strength to ask, she could only watch the back of the youth who answered.

For whose sake did I, Erica Blandelli, come to be caught in this desperate situation? Though she wanted to call him an idiot, her depleted stamina caused Erica to abandon the notion. She substituted her displeasure with a relieved sigh.

'—Godslayer, I cannot follow your orders.'

Ena's lips did not move, and a robotic voice was heard.

Speaking to Godou who stood in front of the weakened Erica, she continued.

'—As the enemy of gods, you are also the enemy of me, the divine sword. To listen to your orders will be my greatest shame.'

"You... are not Seishuuin."

The calm and penetrating voice once again replied.

'Correct, my master and the miko call me Ama no Murakumo, good that you know.'

"Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi! That's Susanoo's weapon, and the Kusanagi sword!"

Godou yelled at the Hime-Miko controlled by the divine blade, the one who looked like Ena but was not Ena.

Seeing him surrounded by countless flashes of light, Erica got a big shock. These were the spell words of the [Sword]!

"Susanoo is a god who shares a long history with [Steel]! His territory Susa is well known for producing iron ore, and he is the god of storms. In ancient times, strong wind provided the greatest assistance to forging iron by fanning the flames to make them stronger, and that intense fire can melt iron!"

The brilliant light of the [Sword] started moving like a stream of meteors, and flew to attack Ena.

Targeted, she silently kicked at the ground, and began running like the wind at superhuman levels, intending to escape the onslaught of the [Sword].

However, it still caught up to her.

Wielding the divine sword with movements like a puppet, she tried to deflect the [Sword] in vain. Steel that should have cut through the spheres of light was pushed back by the light instead.

Erica was certain, these were the spell words that can defeat Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

'...Spell words that can conquer a god and his belongings. True to the status of a godslayer, a most troublesome weapon indeed.'

It was still that robotic voice.

Ena admitted her disadvantage. Ena—no, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi controlled the Hime-Miko to jump backwards.

Such a jump would probably require a human-sized cricket or grasshopper, to instantly create a distance of dozens of meters.

'—Continuing to stay in the Netherworld will cause damage to my miko's body. It would be wise to repeat this duel another time. Godslayer, I shall return to the real world, and wait for you there.'

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi manipulated Ena's body and buried her into the ground.

Darkness consumed the ground beneath her legs and spread out into a great patch of jet-blackness.

This was probably the [Door] that pulled the two of them into the Netherworld. Erica watched in surprise as the darkness gradually swallowed Ena and the divine blade until they disappeared.

"How could that girl do such a thing...?"

"The current Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi is just like a cheap copy of Susanoo. With that smelly old bastard's power, of course it's possible, and because of that, the [Sword] was effective against her."

Godou explained as he massaged his temples.

He was struck with intense pain once again, and the worried Erica hurried over before him.

"Godou, how are you?"

"Perhaps because I forced myself too much to create the [Sword] to defeat Susanoo, using it gives me a great headache. I'm afraid I can't continue..."

Evidently, a lot had happened to Godou and he was reaching his limits.

Erica sighed deeply. Though she was concerned about Ena, who had escaped back to earth, their current biggest problem was being stranded in the Astral Plane. Was there a way for them to leave...?

It was around six in the evening when Amakasu's phone call was received.

"Ena-san disappeared? So has Godou-san and Erica-san?"

At the Nanao Shrine, Mariya Yuri was greatly surprised to receive such news.

'That's right. We have been keeping Ena-san under surveillance, actually.'

Hearing this unsettling news, Yuri frowned. The Committee must have some reason for doing that.

'During the weekend, Ena-san had visited your school and then suddenly ran into Erica-san and Kusanagi-san, and the three of them vanished together... What an unbelievable development.'

Amakasu began to recount in detail everything that happened in order.

His tone of voice suggested that he was the one in charge of the surveillance mission. After all, tailing the highly alert premier Hime-Miko would not be possible except for a master of concealment like Amakasu.

"There was an inside story after all."

'It's the elders, there can be no other. What are they planning?'

The elders who even the History Compilation Committee members have to please.

They were inhuman, supernatural existences. Fairies, demigods, holy monks, ascended ascetics, great magi, vengeful spirits... With all sorts of different legends, they were a group that surpassed humanity and approached immortality. It was said that they had freed themselves from the natural order of reality and chose to live in the Netherworld.

Yuri recalled the Old One watching over Ena, the frightening god who was also known as a [Heretic God] once.

The ancient deity who possessed the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Kidnapping a Campione was something that no one but the elders could do.

However, Yuri could not understand why they were acting so rashly.

This could not be allowed to continue. If she did not learn by trying, she would not be able to improve her powers of deduction. She wanted intelligence and wisdom rivaling Erica and initiative that did not require being led by Ena.

Yuri made a resolute decision as she requested.

"I will now go to school and see if I can discern where Godou-san and the rest have gone."

'Actually I was going to ask you to do that, much appreciated. My apologies.'

The Committee's top investigator seemed a bit happy.

But then he seemed troubled by the condition Yuri proposed next.

'Hmm, I don't think it's a good idea, it's too early for that.'

"No, I believe it is a necessary measure, Amakasu-san. Though it pains me to put it this way, but please regard it as the price and condition for my cooperation."

The "Hime" part of the term Hime-Miko, was not simply for show.

Indeed, the Hime-Miko organization was ranked beneath the History Compilation Committee. On the other hand, the reverence and respect for the bloodline of the Hime-Miko was a tradition passed down over a thousand years.

Amakasu and the members of the Committee did not have the authority to give a Hime-Miko orders on whim.

Yuri decided to take advantage of her status for the first time.

After about an hour, three people gathered on the sports ground of Jounan Academy.

Mariya Yuri, Amakasu Touma, and Liliana Kranjcar.

Though the sky was darkening, the sun had yet to set entirely, which is to say, it was dusk.

In these ambiguous, dimly lit conditions, the silver-haired knight glared at Amakasu Touma.

"I heard that Kusanagi Godou was kidnapped by the one backing Seishuuin Ena."

"Please don't be mad, this time we are also victims... That is why I suggested not bringing her along."

Yuri shook her head at the complaining History Compilation Committee member.

"The magic and knowledge that Liliana-san possesses will definitely come in handy in this situation. Besides, there is no one else with a witch's powers..."

She was one who was outstanding in witchcraft.

Actually, this was also Liliana Kranjcar's most valuable disposition.

In terms of martial ability, she was equal to Erica, while Yuri was vastly superior in spirit vision.

However, Liliana was the only one who could use witchcraft.

Understanding the thoughts of birds and beasts and be able to command them, flying like a bird in the sky, swimming freely like a fish in water, gathering forest herbs to make potions, these were all classified under the most talented domain of witches.

"Since Yuri-san insists, I will not object. So please participate together, Liliana-san... So, let's start immediately?"

Prompted by Amakasu, Yuri surveyed the "crime scene" once again.

Godou, Erica, and Ena disappeared from a corner of the school, and in front of her was a wall of the school building.

—Shivering, she felt even her back shaking.

Terrifying magical traces were discovered.

Liliana also seemed to have felt it, and she narrowed her eyes, focusing on the school wall.

"Mariya Yuri, can you see the problem here? Regrettably, a great power was applied here, and I cannot gather any clues..."

Liliana spoke with great dismay, and Yuri closed her eyes.

Not sight, but "vision" that focused spiritual disposition surpassing the five senses. At this instant, the vision appeared.

—The sun, which dominated the sky, completely darkened like in a solar eclipse.

—Holding the great sword of steel, the storm god appeared, causing the land with the bountiful harvest to wither into a gray wilderness.

"It was Susanoo after all..."

Ever since the Marquis Voban incident, she had not experienced any visions for months.

From the images shown before her eyes, Yuri seemed to have found out what happened.

"I know the method used to take Godou-san and the rest away and also saw where they went."

Yuri explained as she endured her over exhausted body.

Liliana displayed great interest, but Amakasu looked tired for some reason.

"Perhaps you already have an idea, Amakasu-san?"

"Amongst the ones capable of kidnapping a Campione, I already have a very good idea. Requesting your spirit vision was just to obtain concrete proof. Since this is an internal affair, I still hope the outsider can be dismissed."

"No, Liliana-san's wisdom is truly needed for what comes after."

Yuri cast an apologetic gaze at Amakasu.

Then she turned towards and bowed her head at Liliana who had been excluded from the conversation and was showing signs of displeasure.

"I beg you, please tell me the method to save Godou-san, Erica-san and Ena-san from the Netherworld—the Boundary of Life and Immortality."

After listening to the gist of the situation, the witch and Great Knight showed a troubled expression.

"A deity who used to be a [Heretic God]? This country is harboring such a monster!"

"If possible, I also wish he would hurry up and pass on, but that's not going to happen. He's been hanging around for over a thousand years. To be honest, we are also very troubled too."

"Amakasu-san, your description is a bit..."

Yuri scolded Amakasu for his imprudent comment as she waited for the witch's response.

Since they were now aware that Godou and Erica were trapped in the Netherworld, they had to go over to bring them back. Now the only one capable of using that kind of spell was the silver-haired witch.

"In order to transfer to the Astral Plane, the magical ritual and the required medication are needed. I already know the ritual, but the problem is the potion..."

Liliana's expression darkened as she continued to speak.

"I know the recipe, but I don't have the ingredients. A few precious herbs are essential, but I don't have them on hand and must send for them from back home."

"Then what if we go buy them right now? I've heard that shops selling those kinds of things exist in Tokyo."

Yuri had heard from Amakasu and others at the History Compilation Committee.

They occasionally monitored shops that secretly sold wizardry tools and catalysts.

However, Liliana showed an 'oh no' kind of stiff expression.

"Actually... I have no idea where those shops are located."

"Eh?"

"Because... I have been busy taking care of Kusanagi Godou, so I have not spent the time to familiarize myself with people and places in that field in Tokyo..."

Liliana bowed her head and confessed, embarrassed.

Her fingers twiddling, the blush on her face was especially cute. It was completely different from Liliana's usual awe-inspiring appearance. Then Yuri suddenly thought of the adage "putting the cart before the horse."

"No, no, just ask Amakasu-san to lead the way."

Tentatively, she first tried a relatively safe solution. Unfortunately, reality was cruel.

"Uh, no can do, I'm afraid. Any ingredient or catalyst required by high level magic, above rank E in difficulty, has to be ordered in advance. Using online shopping parlance, it's under the category of 'delivery time unknown.' Even if we rushed over right away, we won't get it."

"T-Then they must have logistics problems!"

"Actually, I think it's even stranger for the Kranjcar family to keep those items lying around the house!"

Liliana felt furious at Amakasu's tactless honesty.

There was no time to wait for a delivery from Italy. In that time span, the worst situation could develop.

Just as Yuri was about to consider other options.

A suspicious presence could be felt... from Amakasu's body.

She once read a mystery novel that someone recommended to her as guaranteed to be interesting.

She had the exact same feeling of suspicion towards a character that appeared around the tenth page or so. As she paid attention to that character and continued reading, it turned out the person was the final culprit.

Henceforth, Yuri avoided the genre as much as possible. Very calmly, she said:

"Amakasu-san, what are you trying to hide?"

"Uh... I don't know what you're talking about. Could it be your imagination?"

The History Compilation Committee special operative was subtly averting eye contact.

Undeterred, Yuri continued to ask, determined to speak her mind.

"Since the name Sayanomiya suddenly appeared in my mind, could it be... that family is involved?"

"Sayanomiya? What is that?"

"The History Compilation Committee is an organization run under the direction of the Sayanomiya family. They are steeped in the traditions of wizardry, and several generations ago, their family head had gone to study in Europe and learned knowledge about magic over there--"

As she explained to Liliana who interrupted with a question, Yuri recalled a certain incident.

During the Marquis Voban incident, at the time when she visited the secret library at Aobadai.

That facility stored grimoires collected and confiscated from all over Japan by special operatives like Amakasu. Come to think of it, the Committee surely must collect more than books.

"Perhaps, amongst the various items Amakasu-san and your colleagues confiscate, there are the items that Liliana called ingredients? Those are probably kept in the Sayanomiya residence. .."

"Hahaha, how can that be possible, please don't guess randomly ."

"Whether or not it is a random guess, everything will be cleared up by an investigation."

Liliana drew her beloved sword in front of Amakasu who was playing dumb.

The magic sword Il Maestro was personally forged by a top blacksmith and mage.

"I will go directly into that residence and search. If it is not there , then I will search all the facilities belonging to your Committee."

Discerning Yuri's thoughts from the dialogue just now, Liliana declared with great awe-inspiring impact.

Although from an ethical standpoint, this kind of behavior was not very appropriate. However, she still made her declaration openly.

Yuri was very impressed. Threats should be made in such a manner? A lesson learnt.

"Sigh... As expected, calling her here was trouble. Fine, I confess , I know how the required ingredients can be obtained. The Sayanomiya residence does have these things, but due to various reasons, they cannot be moved arbitrarily, so it would be best not to go there."

Amakasu finally spoke the truth amidst sighing tones.

Knowing she was now able to save her dear friends, Yuri could not help but feel excitement in her heart.

Part 4

Netherworld, Astral Plane, Boundary of Life and Immortality.

In this space with many different names, Godou was caught in a dilemma.

Ena, under Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's control, had escaped a while ago. Though his body felt like an hour has passed, Godou knew such impressions were unreliable because the flow of time in this place was unlikely to be the same as on earth. After some rest, Godou's headache had also recovered almost completely. However—

Erica's condition was taking a turn for the worse.

Her face in pain, she was breathing irregularly and sweating profusely. Godou tried to touch her and found her body temperature unusually elevated as if under high fever. She also had no strength left and could not even turn herself over.

Completely drained, she was lying in the shade of a tree beside the river.

"Given the current situation, I guess the only way is to return to the mountain just now..."

Godou muttered to himself. Since he did not have the knowledge or skills to help Erica, he must ask for help. And in this mysterious space, he only knew three "people," if they could be called that. Susanoo and the mummified monk aside, perhaps the benevolent princess might extend a helping hand.

"May I ask: how is this world structured?"

Worrying about Erica's condition, Godou asked.

In order to save her and leave, he needed information.

There was a beautiful river here that flowed somewhere.

As well as a seemingly limitless plain.

This scenery extended to the horizon without any change.

The little house in the mountain where Susanoo was located seemed to be in one direction, or perhaps not. To have suddenly jumped out here in an instant, even Godou could not believe his eyes.

"...Susanoo's location is a different space from here. If I'm not mistaken, the Astral Plane is composed of many disconnected worlds and spaces. You must have performed a spatial transfer between them..."

Erica quoted from what she had read in books and explained to Godou.

Without her usual flair when speaking, it seemed like her stamina had been draining continuously, and Godou nodded to her, frantic for a solution to the situation.

"In other words, this is very similar to an apartment building, you know? Though you live under the same roof, homes are separated by walls and floors, but you can still move about using corridors and stairs."

A broad world that contained countless independent spaces and linked together like a spider's web.

Even for the storm god Susanoo, no matter how much he summons violent storms, the only affected area was the "room" he occupied.

Which explained why [Heretic Gods], whose mere existence brought disaster to the world, could live secluded in this realm.

"...But you just used the [Warrior] form so the [Sword] is no longer available for now. If we're going to Susanoo's place, shouldn't you wait first?"

"No, if this continues, your body will not last."

Verethragna's ten incarnations.

Godou's authority, usurped from the ancient Persian Warlord, had many restrictions.

After each use, an incarnation could only be reused after the passage of one day.

The [Sword] was already invoked when he met the old god. As much as possible, Godou should avoid direct conflict against Susanoo without a trump card. However, Godou shook his head at Erica's suggestion.

"I will find a way. Even though there are a few distasteful fellows, someone nice is also there."

Godou quietly picked up Erica in his arms and laid her on his back.

Attempting the method just now, his mind imagined the little house in the mountain and the surrounding beautiful scenery, and then wished to go there.

—And then, Godou and Erica were suddenly transferred to a beach.

Before their eyes was a beautiful deep, blue sea. Waves quietly broke against them.

"H-How could this happen!"

"Looks like your imagination is lacking... Though Godou is a Campione, you never received special training... Perhaps without a certain level of magical competence, the transfer will not succeed... "

"But I just went to where you were without any issues!"

"...That was surely because you could see the scenery... A scene before your eyes compared to one recalled purely from memory, there is a huge difference in difficulty."

Erica explained from his back.

However, she spoke slowly and paused many times. Godou began to enter a state of panic. If this continued, her life will be threatened, the next attempt must succeed!

Once again, he secured the scenery in his mind. It is a mountain. He must reach Susanoo's mountain this time.

But where Godou and Erica arrived was a totally bare and barren mountain.

Brown rocks, dry wind, blue sky. It would not be surprising to find eagles and vultures circling in the air. It was a completely opposite scene from the lush green mountain.

"Damn it, one more time!"

The third attempt at imagination and third transfer, but this was not even a natural habitat.

It was a white space. The surroundings were entirely white.

A space where the whiteness extended from one horizon to another.

Ticktock, ticktock. There was also a strange sound, the sound of clocks running.

Carrying Erica on his back, Godou looked around him.

Very soon, an ancient clock appeared in his sight, but then the clock ticking was also heard from behind him. Turning around, he found a silver pocket watch. As the left side sounded as well, a massive clock tower could be seen in that direction...

As soon as the clock ticking was heard, a new clock would appear. This repeated dozens of times.

"Godou... this isn't working, you are completely lost..."

Erica protested in a barely audible voice.

Godou let out a huge sigh. Looks like he is running into dead ends. One more time, try again, a steady image. This time he must transfer to the place in his heart.

"...Not working after all..."

Hearing Erica's tired voice, Godou was speechless.

The two of them had arrived at a stone paved street.

A simple gothic street, one could have mistaken it for the Italian countryside.

Little houses linked by the eaves of their roofs, roads and squares paved with brick. If this place was Earth, the scenery would most likely be classified as a world heritage site.

But there was not a single soul here. Looking around, no other person could be spotted. It was an empty street.

He could feel Erica's breathing quicken as she lay on his back.

Her breaths spaced apart by shortening intervals, it appeared that the multiple transfers had taken their toll on her body.

Finding a little park nearby, Godou laid Erica on the grass and sat down beside her. He felt so bad about things that he would have kicked a trashcan had there been one.

"Damn, I am out of ideas. If this continues, then this really is the end."

"By the way... Godou, I have a request."

Godou jumped in surprise. Erica was speaking in rare innocent tones.

She essentially never used this voice except in the mornings when she just woke up. Currently, she was in an even more vulnerable state.

"I feel like death is near, could you give me a final passionate kiss or embrace...?"

"Y-you stop saying such foolish words! Don't say something so unlucky!"

Neither half of the statement was acceptable, so Godou immediately scolded her.

But Erica shook her head lightly.

"This future is very likely... I am already unable to heal this body with my own power, and I have no method to leave the Astral Plane. Furthermore, I have no way to reach a third party who can rescue us from here... This is the end."

Godou swallowed words of denial.

His own stupidity was the reason why they could not return to Susanoo's place.

"So, let's start preparing for the future. If I am no longer here, you must follow my instructions..."

"Come on! Stop joking as if you're leaving final words!"

"I am not joking. Weren't you the one who just said this was the end?"

His words picked apart, Godou fell silent.

Just as she said, he understood very well that he was powerless to do anything unless they returned to Susanoo's location. Even if Erica did not spell it out, he knew.

"T-Then I will ask one more time, kiss me, embrace me tightly... If possible, treat this as a continuation of that time in Sicily, no? You still can't decide?"

She asked with a mischievous tone of voice.

Erica placed her hand over Godou's hand, but did not use the usual unnatural strength. She no longer had spare strength or magic to increase her arm strength.

However, her sincere expression was adorable to a heartbreaking degree.

"At least tell me, how do you really feel about me... Do not dodge the issue like usual, you have to be clear...?"

How he felt about Erica? Wasn't this already obvious!

Perhaps death really was near as she said. But Godou did not want to admit it. How could he let something like that happen? Still, Godou's rationality told him it was true.

Godou's heart was invaded by fury and anxiety, as well as terror at the thought of losing her.

Godou tightly held Erica's hand.

Then he drew his face near, his lips slowly approaching her thin yet seductive lips. Then pressed upon them—

Kissing each other.

They repeated this motion for quite a while.

"Godou... This is your first time kissing me on your own initiative."

Tens of seconds later, their lips separated, and Erica spoke softly.

Despite the crisis they were trapped in, her face was filled with satisfaction and happiness.

Seeing her expression, Godou's heart was greatly shaken.

The feelings of tender affection for her, the fear of losing her, the anxiety over finding a solution, the agitation and anger. All sorts of emotions assaulted Godou simultaneously.

But the most intense emotion was anger.

Anger at the circumstances taking her away from him, and anger at his own incompetence.

"Ah... it hurts. Godou, please be a bit softer..."

Unwittingly he had held her even tighter, causing Erica to plead .

Instead Godou held Erica's weak and slender hand, not lightly but gripping harder. Erica accepted this action without any rejection.

Instead, she happily closed her eyes, smiling as she leaned closer to Godou, pressing her body weight against him.

At that moment, this girl entrusted her heart and body entirely to Godou.

Understanding that, the anger in Godou's heart reached new heights. He let go of Erica's hand and stood up to glare at the sky. Perhaps far away on the other side, gods really existed and yet they still dared to create this tragic fate as if toying with humanity.

Glaring at those supernatural existences, his anger continued to burn.

Crying because someone precious will be leaving him forever? Impossible. Mourning for a period of time, and then using the rest of his existence to live life fully and sing praises of love? Impossible. Living a life of regret and anger with despair and a broken heart because his lover passed away? Completely rubbish!

These were not actions fit for a [King]. A god-slaying Devil King was not going to act this way.

Most importantly, he himself could not accept living in such a manner!

Godou's savage eyes gave off light. Previously, this happened only when his heart was fired up and he smiled with the joy of battle during his struggles against gods or other Campiones, but he was not in that kind of mood this time.

No matter what comes along, be it god or Buddha, he will slay them all!

If fate was unacceptable, he will use his will and authority to crush fate beneath his feet.

If he could not even do something like that, then how could he call himself the Devil King? Who dares to take Erica away? Whose woman do you think you are taking!

"...Godou? What is going on with you? Why is your expression so horrible? Why are you different from usual?"

Next to him, Erica felt intimidated and questioned.

However, he ignored her. Comforting and showering this girl with affection was something to be done later.

What needed to be done now was to intercept unreasonable Fate and anything else trying to take her life! Where to go? Who needs to be beaten?

Where is the opponent I need to defeat? I will absolutely not let him out of my grasp—!!

In that instant, he was struck with pain.

His brain suddenly felt like it was burning, and was hurting intensely.

This was the same pain as when he obtained knowledge of Susanoo, the burden brought by spirit vision.

Why was it appearing now? The previous time was because of using the [Warrior]—activating Verethragna's incarnation and injecting knowledge of the god into the [Sword], right?

But at this time there should not be an incarnation that he could make use of. No...

Or perhaps there actually existed an incarnation that could save Erica and protect her?

The instant he thought that, the change occurred.

He saw it. Replacing his headache was spirit vision, which showed him how to use the new power.

The feeling he felt when fighting Voban resurfaced, an incomparable sense of omnipotence that filled his body and mind. Now I hold everything in my hands and have obtained everything!

"Erica... I absolutely will never let you go, so please swear to me ."

Having mastered Verethragna's fifth incarnation, Godou spoke the spell words.

"Hurry up and swear! Stay by my side no matter what... Even if life is coming to an end, even if the world itself is coming to an end , even if it means battling all the gods, stay by my side forever."

This was not ordinary speech but holy words infused with power usurped from the gods.

At the same time, this was an arrogant king's sacred decree that demanded an everlasting oath.

Gazing at his majestic splendor from beside him, Erica's beautiful expression turned joyous and trance-like.

"Could you have awakened that incarnation? You finally mastered the entirety of Verethragna!?"

"Quit the useless words. Do you want to make an oath? Now hurry and decide!"

"Of course I swear! Until the day the world is destroyed, I will always stay by your side, giving everything I've got!"

Erica immediately yelled in response to the stern scolding.

Accompanied by the most beautiful and most obedient smile from the bottom of her heart that she had ever shown.

Hearing her oath, Godou nodded deeply.

The fifteen-year-old youth who shone with light.

This was the appearance chosen by the war god they met on Sardinia.

As the hero and the saint, Verethragna's fifth incarnation that leads the people and watches over them.

Mastering this power, Godou definitely could protect this girl. Thus, Erica must now obtain the mark of the protector, Godou, and receive his protection and blessing.

Godou pushed Erica's slender body down upon the grass.

Though it was done roughly, neither of them minded. The two of them were now the king and the protected, the dominator and the dominated.

Godou laid himself over the girl's body, and once again took her lips.

"—Mmm, mmm~~"

He greedily savored the lips of the panting Erica.

It would have been more appropriate if he showed concern for her weak body and treated her gently instead—

However, it was too late to stop, Godou advanced without resistance, his lips pressed upon Erica's, his tongue licking her thin lips and then reaching deep into her mouth.

His tongue probed for Erica's tongue, finding it and entangling together. She responded in turn and yielded to his entanglement, and the two of them tangled together without pause.

...The sound of mucous membranes harmoniously engaged in exchange could be heard.

Pressed under Godou's weight, Erica's body breathed heavily. Though her build was very delicate, her body was extremely voluptuous in all the right places.

Warm and full of elasticity, her body gave an incredible tactile feeling, and felt hotter than anything.

The pleasure of intimate contact with her, as well as the feeling of intoxication produced by an uncountable repetition of kisses.

The intense heavy breathing of both sides gave Erica an intense feeling of being alive.

Seeing Erica's state of disarray, hearing her delicate breathing, smelling her fragrance, tasting the flavor of her tongue and saliva, feeling Erica's warm skin—

The five senses, the mind, and the entire body were overcome with pleasure as if drowned in honey.

However, Godou's intention was not to seek such intoxication.

"Erica, starting now I will transmit my power—Verethragna's to you. You will likely suffer, but you must endure. Can you do it? Will you bear it?"

"Yes, I know, I will definitely endure... Please, Godou."

She struggled to nod and affirm her oath despite her weak condition, and Godou kissed her lips once again.

Lips and tongue, saliva and teeth, Godou left nothing untouched.

As he did so, Godou felt as if a channel opened up between Erica and him.

An invisible wizardry channel through which the strongest [Protection] could be transmitted from one to the other.

Godou's consciousness transmitted to his lower abdomen.

It was the energy center termed by Chinese medicine as the *dantian*[40], in other words, the deepest part of the body.

From there he began to raise his magical power and in the process distilled pure magical power into [Protection].

From the lower abdomen to the abdomen, then to the chest, and finally through the throat and transmitted to the mouth.

Magical power which rose up as if following the backbone was poured into Erica's mouth through the lips.

What converted this power into [Protection] was his feelings for her—the wish to protect her and the hope to grant her power. Kusanagi Godou prayed so in his heart.

"Godou... I can feel what you are giving to me."

Fascinated, Erica murmured with her eyes closed.

Speaking as they kissed, each vibration of the lips, soft and sweet, everything could be experienced.

However, this was simply the opening, and the climax had yet to be reached.

In order to hasten the pouring of distilled [Protection] into her body, Godou increased the flow rate.

"—!?"

Erica briefly moaned in discomfort.

Letting go of her lips for an instant, tears could be seen in the corner of her eyes as she gasped for breath.

"Erica, if you cannot bear it..."

"No, it's fine. Continue. It was the sudden increase in speed that gave me a fright. This time I will endure; hurry up with the next step...?"

She was clearly putting up a front, but Godou pretended not to notice.

Erica Blandelli's affections and body were all Godou's possessions. Forcing actions of pain and tolerance upon this girl was his exclusive right and privilege.

He will not permit anyone else to cause any pain and suffering to Erica.

Now in direct proportion to the pain she received was the strongest [Protection].

Godou looked at her once again, and Erica returned with a passionate gaze. The two of them nodded in assent, and began another deep kiss...

"Mmmm—! No problem, continue..!"

Erica painfully tensed her body.

Godou embraced her body tightly as support, holding her hand to provide encouragement, and Erica gripped his hand in return. From the strength of her grip, one could imagine the level of pain she was feeling.

Godou was no longer able to attend to her, and could only continue the outpour of Verethragna's [Protection] in one breath.

"Ah, aaaaaaaah!"

Erica cried out, but Godou did not stop. He could not hesitate.

Finally, the [Protection] reached the deepest part of her body, the important energy center in the lower abdomen.

"—!"

Erica's cries became hoarse and unrecognizable.

As she tightly gripped Godou's hand, her other hand that was embracing him had left deep and bloody scratches along Godou's back. While enduring the pain, Godou continued to press his lips upon Erica's.

She should be in much greater pain than me, so this is nothing.

The holy war god's protection.

The seal of the victor bestowed by the glorious hero.

The pulse of magical energy delivered by Godou had temporarily strengthened Erica's body and mind.

A Campione had the tenacity to adapt to the environment of the Astral Plane in a short time, the boundless life force to heal immediately from any damage within a certain level, and the battle instincts to enter their strongest condition during battle. All these qualities were now infused into Erica's body.

Erica's body went limp.

Her entire body drenched with sweat, but no signs of pain could be seen on her beautiful face any more.

She tightly held Godou's hand and smiled quietly.

Her smile carried a sliver of fatigue, but it was a very agreeable sense of tiredness.

Godou separated from her, though he felt a slight reluctance to leave Erica's burning hot and lithe body. However, if this posture continued it could get problematic...

Erica also got up immediately.

Her face full of smiles, she pounced upon the unwary Godou. Her weight felt rather comfortable.

However, Godou's rationality told him, this cannot continue.

"W-Wait a minute! The ritual's over, and Verethragna's protection is already within your body, so it doesn't need to continue..."

"Of course I am aware of that. This is my return gift to Godou's love. Accept it obediently."

This time it was Godou's turn to be pushed down by Erica.

Looks like once she recovered, she immediately reversed their top-down positions.

"I-It wasn't love, more like friendship and concern—"

"No, it's love, I understand."

Her lips drawing near, it had been quite a while since he last experienced a kiss initiated by Erica.

In order to escape the situation, Godou was going to resist with force, but before he finished his thought, he gave up... For some unknown reason, he suddenly lost that compulsion. Might as well continue with this position for now.

Eventually letting go of his lips, Erica showed a smile that said, "Pass."

Chapter 7 - Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi

Part 1

Banchou Sarayashiki.[41] The original setting for the legend of the dish-counting ghost who kept muttering to itself, "one is missing."

In the special Tokyo ward of Chiyoda, the Banchou area was a very high class residential neighborhood where high ranking warriors[42] and lords[43] lived since the Edo period.

The home of the Sayanomiya family in Sanbanchou was quite close to the Tokyo Imperial Palace.

Hidden in a very inconspicuous location on the roadside amongst many offices and luxury apartments, the Sayanomiya residence was a western style mansion built in the Taisho era.

Based on its physical location, the property value should have been quite high, but the house did not leave a good impression on people.

Not only was it extremely old and decrepit, but it was also dark like a haunted house and felt like there were ghosts and monsters.

Arriving here in Amakasu's car, Yuri began to feel a sense of unease.

As if something ominous lurked there—a most unpleasant presence. By the way, this was her first visit to the Sayanomiya residence.

"I've already informed the other side beforehand, so let's go. Please walk over here."

Before them, Amakasu pointed to the entrance. Yuri and Liliana followed his direction.

It took two minutes to walk to the front door from the parking lot through the front yard.

"The house is smaller than expected... As the leader of the family that commands the History Compilation Committee, is this not too cramped?"

Liliana surveyed the house.

"Considering the land prices of this neighborhood, this house is a bargain. Actually, there's a bigger house at Setagaya. This is just a secondary residence and the current owner Kaoru-san is the next family head."

With a great sense of familiarity, Amakasu opened the front door.

The one who greeted them was a young man in a formal butler uniform.

This man displayed highly trained skills of a hotel attendant. Amakasu engaged him in whispers before walking inside.

Yuri and Liliana followed behind him and reached a room that seemed to be the study.

"Kyoko, how is it going? Calling me so suddenly. Tomorrow? Sorry, something is scheduled already. Hahaha, how can that be possible? It's not a date of course. Don't have strange suspicions."

This pleasant voice was familiar to Yuri.

In the study, Sayanomiya Kaoru had just hung up her cellphone .

Noticing Amakasu, Yuri, and Liliana, Kaoru was just about to greet them when the cellphone rang again. Glancing at the LCD, she said "sorry" and picked up the call.

"It's been a while, Haremi. Yes, I am fine too. Sorry, I have some things to discuss right now. May I hang up? Oh... I remember next week's promise very well, then goodbye."

Finishing the call with simplicity, Kaoru hung up, but then it rang again.

"Who is it this time... Kiyoko?"

"No, it's Ayano, but I'll pick it up later since everyone has gathered."

Watching the next Sayanomiya family head shrug her shoulders , Amakasu nagged in earnest.

"Kaoru-san, what are you planning if you don't reveal your gender to all these girls who have fallen for you? To be tricked and left completely in the dark, aren't they pitiful?"

"But even if I told them the truth, there are many girls who would go 'it does not matter.' I was very surprised."

In a different way, this Hime-Miko was no less a troublesome character than Ena.

Numerous girls admired Kaoru and fell head over heels in love with her. However, she seemed to enjoy this and actively socialized with them.

"Let me introduce for Liliana-san. This is Sayanomiya Kaoru-san. The Tokyo Branch Chief of the History Compilation Committee and next Sayanomiya family head, plus a member of the Hime-Miko."

"...Did you say Hime-Miko?"

Liliana stared in surprise.

She must have been greatly shocked. Kaoru was wearing a white shirt and tie with men's dress pants. Though very pretty, it was an image too far removed from that of a delicate young girl.

With an elegant smile and refined airs, Kaoru greeted her European guest.

"A pleasure to meet you, Liliana Kranjcar-san. My appearance may suggest otherwise, but I am still Yuri and Ena's colleague, though I've heard countless times that it is impossible to imagine me wearing a miko's outfit."

Kaoru made a gesture towards the sofa couch, and Liliana and Yuri each took a seat.

As they sat down, Kaoru took a seat opposite them while Amakasu stood ready behind her.

"I already heard Yuri and Liliana's request on the phone just now. Let's start with the conclusion. If you agree to our conditions, then assisting you is not a problem."

"Is this okay, Kaoru-san? The previous previous generation will have objections."

"There will be troubles from that side, but provided equivalent value is exchanged, I will not be stingy. Of course, it still depends on the terms of the agreement."

As the master and subordinate conversed, Liliana interrupted.

"Do not forget we still have the option of seizing by force."

"That's not good, you've met Ena right? Amongst those involved with the Committee, there exist talents who rival the martial and magical abilities of the Great Knights. My honest advice is please do not act recklessly."

Liliana scoffed in disdain but backed down from her declaration
.

Regardless of the outcome of starting a fight here, if she were to be pursued by several elites she had little chance of winning. Liliana understood very well that as long as it was within this country, the other side had the home field advantage.

"Even if I am attacked here, Amakasu-san will take the knife for me, right?"

"Sorry but I must refuse, please do not expect loyalty that exceeds my pay grade."

"Uh... fine whatever."

Kaoru coughed at Amakasu's response that left her hanging in embarrassment.

"Liliana-san and Yuri, let's get to the main point."

Yuri prepared herself, for she understood well the extreme craftiness of the cross-dressing miko before her eyes. Even Ena, who always did things her own way, described Kaoru as "very troublesome!" If possible, it would be best to minimize contact with her.

"Yes, let me give an example, if our condition for providing the ingredients is to request that Liliana-san return to her country... Is this acceptable?"

"I will never accept such a condition!"

Liliana angrily refused while Kaoru laughed "hoho."

A very likable and open smile. This was one of her weapons.

"Ah, if the number of Europeans around Kusanagi increased, it won't be good for him. Like this time, it was Ena's excuse for getting involved. Disregarding the [Copper Black Cross] for now, I hope you, Liliana-san of the [Bronze Black Cross], can exercise some self-discipline."

"Why is it fine for Erica but not me?"

"Yes—perhaps if I put it this way, you will be angry... Because you are a girl who doesn't know adult ways of communication."

Kaoru spoke with profound meaning in her words.

Her beautiful face, resembling both a young man's and woman's at the same time, was shrouded by a mysterious sense of melancholy.

"If I were to negotiate with Erica, I'm sure a deal could be reached via a very interesting discussion. But after hearing about your exploits in Japan since your arrival, I don't think you are that kind of person, Liliana Kranjcar."

Striking directly at the other party's vulnerabilities and instigating a battle of words. Kaoru was getting serious.

"These past three months, we have acquiesced to Erica-san's existence because she has accepted us—in particularly accepted coexistence with Yuri who was sent by us. Take the trip to Sardinia for example, if Erica-san wished, she could have left Yuri alone in Japan."

Now that it was mentioned, she apparently had a clear grasp of the latest developments of Godou and Yuri (plus the History Compilation Committee).

Yuri recalled the summer holiday and the way Erica said 'I want to let you and Godou deepen your friendship' while she expressed her acceptance of Yuri through her attitude.

"However, Liliana-san is not like that... As soon as you arrived in Japan, you have stuck to Kusanagi-san like glue and treated Erica-san and our Yuri with hostility. You have given us sufficient cause to eliminate you."

"Eliminating hazards to the master is part of a knight's duty!"

Liliana responded with a warrior's style, causing Kaoru to elegantly force a smile.

"However, Kusanagi is not just your master. At the same time, he is also Erica-san and Yuri-san's master, as well as the [King] of all magi in the world. If you can't understand what I'm getting at, then Liliana-san is just a knight bodyguard at best. Am I correct?"

"Is there anything wrong with being a bodyguard? That is part of a knight's duty in serving the king!"

"Yes, nothing wrong with that, but while you are toiling away doing a guard and a servant's job, Erica-san and I are already fighting for the prime minister's position. Also, either Erica or Yuri , whom I recommended, could become his first lady. Is this fine as well?"

Under the mischievous questioning of the cross-dressing Hime-Miko, Liliana's eyes began to show signs of consternation.

"The History Compilation Committee is already planning on pledging their loyalty to Kusanagi Godou!?"

"I am just saying that this outcome is very likely, but it is still under review... Just kidding. Were it true, those troublesome elders would not be a problem any longer."

Kaoru pretended to be joking, but Yuri understood. Since the words just said—especially the last sentence, did not feel like just a joke.

"Even so, why must I return to my country?"

"It was just an example. Seeing as we will all eventually serve the same [King] as our master, I propose we cooperate. If possible, could you look after Yuri a bit? From your standpoint, having us as an ally should be advantageous, right?"

"What you mean is... for me to ally with the History Compilation Committee?"

"You don't have to answer straight away, but give it careful consideration. Also, though this is just my personal opinion, if you want to resist Erica, it'd be best to do some preparatory work first."

"Umm... Fine, I will consider whether to ally with you or not."

Kaoru resumed her friendly smiling face as a result of Liliana backing down.

In truth, she never even considered getting rid of the knight from the [Bronze Black Cross].

Even a strong competitor could be turned into a chess piece under her control. This was Kaoru's style. The preceding conversation was planned exactly for this result. Yuri realized with a fright. After Liliana's turn, she was going to be next.

"Next, Yuri. I hope you can make a few clarifications."

Indeed it came. Kaoru explained calmly.

"So far, we simply requested that you play the role of Godou's lover in name only. But as you probably know, as soon as Ena was sent here, the situation changed drastically."

Yuri began to consider her options as she listened to Kaoru's fluent explanation.

Her spirit sense activated to inform her the gist of Kaoru's demands.

Ena and Erica were currently absent. More importantly, Godou was not here either. Yuri could subtly sense the intentions of the History Compilation Committee and Sayanomiya Kaoru. How should she answer in such a situation?

"I don't like tasteless acts and have no intention of forcing a loveless relationship on someone. So it's probably time for you..."

"No problem."

Determined, Yuri interrupted Kaoru with steady confidence.

"The feelings between Godou-san and I will not end in simple friendship."

With an expression of decisiveness, Yuri looked straight into the face of the androgynous beauty.

Kaoru showed a rare expression of seriousness. Liliana went " Eh!?" followed by Amakasu making a "oh~~" expression from behind the sofa.

"I-I am not sure if I can become that great one's wife, but I will definitely achieve the closest position to that."

"Is this what your spirit vision told you? Or your own wish?"

Faced with Kaoru's sudden question, Yuri blushed and replied:

"Both... probably. The first time I saw Godou-san, I had a feeling that I would form an extraordinary relationship with him. Even now, whenever I think about his safety... I am full of unease."

From the start, before meeting Kusanagi Godou.

The thought of meeting the brutal Campione had terrified Yuri in the past.

But after the first meeting, she was able to relax her nervous emotions, and all her worries disappeared. In fact, she started lecturing the world renowned Devil King.

From that moment, she felt that she could get along well with him.

Now, whenever she thought about him who had gone missing and his current safety—

Unease and fear precipitated in the depths of her heart. He must be saved, so Yuri must change herself and prayed to see him back safe and sound.

As these thoughts and feelings melded into one, an incredible idea came to mind.

Entrusting herself to this idea and working hard towards it within her ability, Yuri made her decision.

"I see. Then you will offer your chastity to Kusanagi, is that correct?"

"S-Sayanomiya! W-What are you saying!?"

"C-Correct. I cannot give it to him right away, but in the foreseeable future, it will likely be inevitable..."

"Mariya Yuri, stop joining in this farce, what on earth are you saying!?"

Yuri ignored Liliana's protests and declared her will. Kaoru smiled wryly and said:

"Well, now that everything has been spelled out to this extent, I have nothing more to say. It's sufficient, Yuri."

"T-Then, may I add something?"

Enduring everyone's gaze focusing on her, Yuri spoke:

"I will follow Godou-san to the corners of the world, and even if the Committee commands me to harm him, I will never comply. If he decides to distance himself away from the Committee, then I will leave the Committee in order to follow him. Please do not forget this!"

Riding on her rising emotion, Yuri made the above declaration.

Kaoru and Amakasu looked at each other after going "Hey, this is really..." and "She's quite something." Then a mischievous expression crossed the master's face before she resumed seriously:

"I will bear that in mind, Hime. Then Amakasu, as the wedding gift, go take *that* out."

"Ah—I really have to go to the storeroom after all? No other way around it..."

As soon as the word "storeroom" was spoken, the tables in the study began to shake, and so did the bookshelves.

It did not seem like an earthquake. From the corner of the room, the sharp noise of something breaking could be heard.

Yuri and Liliana exchanged glances, as a witch she sensed it—here in this building existed an inhuman resident.

"You two already realized? Amazing, how very sharp of you. The herbs you need are kept in my family's storeroom. In it are the collections of the ancestors over the ages. Whenever anyone wants to touch them, great-grandfather gets very naggy and will even make a troublesome commotion."

"Kaoru-san's great-grandfather—the previous previous Sayanomiya family head!"

Sayanomiya Koremichi. The founder of the History Compilation Committee who went to Europe to study foreign magic. Born in the Meiji period and passed away in the fortieth year of the Shouwa period.

Recalling his biographical details, Yuri fell silent. This meant...

"All the heads of the Sayanomiya family, throughout the ages, were avid and compulsive collectors. Even after their deaths, they would watch over those collections. Other than Amakasu receiving a few near death experiences on his way to retrieving things from the storeroom, there is no real danger, so don't worry."

"That is why I said. Please do not ask me to do things exceeding my pay grade! I just can't stand this!"

"What's wrong, shouldn't a ninja serve the public selflessly?"

"That ridiculous description is what binds us to labor under extremely hazardous working conditions!"

Yuri and Liliana's eyes widened with surprise at the revelation of the haunted house from the little argument between the superior and her subordinate.

In any case, they were now properly prepared to save Godou and the rest.

"Then let us start preparing the ritual for entering the Astral Plane... To be honest, I have only used this kind of high level magic once, so I cannot be completely confident."

Liliana seemed to be trying to chase away her doubt.

"But I will try my best, and I hope everyone will assist me."

"If that's the case, I have a suggestion. Due to spell specializations, even though you are both miko, letting Yuri handle the aspects of the Astral Plane will allow much faster progress."

Kaoru spoke as she glanced over.

Yuri also agreed, since her spirit vision was what western magi called extracting [Memories of the Void]. In that case, the one most suited to taking action on the other side was—

Part 2

Meanwhile, the two trapped in the Netherworld could do nothing but take it easy.

Their location was still the same. Amongst the empty streets and within the empty park, Godou sat on the grass while Erica lazily used his thigh as a pillow to lie on.

"Is it really okay for us to do nothing like this..."

"It can't be helped, because there is nothing we can do."

Compared to the worried Godou, Erica was very relaxed.

"Knowing we have disappeared, Yuri and Liliana will surely start searching, so all we need to do is wait for them."

"Can we be found?"

"It's not impossible, given the combination of Yuri's spirit vision and Liliana's magic... But it could take a while. The only concern is how long the [Youth]'s protection will hold out for."

Erica analyzed calmly as she pressed her cheek against Godou's lap pillow.

"Probably quite a while, but the protection cannot sustain itself indefinitely... So, the only thing we can do now is affirm our love for each other."

"How did it come to this!? We should be using our time for something more constructive!"

"With my knowledge and magic, nothing can be done about the current situation. Same for Godou's authority. Look, there's nothing to do but wait. So, let's do something that neither of us will regret."

Lying on Godou's lap, Erica turned to face him.

Seeing her happiness and satisfaction, incomparable to past expressions, Godou's heart began to race.

"Godou was great just now... That savagery, and even ordering me around... Hoho, injecting some freshness like that once in a while is not bad."

"I-Is that so? Whatever, if you didn't mind, it's fine."

Godou suppressed his anxiety.

The way he lost control just now was probably under the influence of Verethragna's authority.

During the ritual, he and Erica seemed like they were caught in a very abnormal state.

"Yes, about the protection obtained just now."

Unfazed by Godou's anxiety, Erica caressed her abdomen.

"Right here, there seems to be a very warm and vigorous mass of life energy. Just feeling this spot makes me feel very happy... As if our child was in my womb."

"What—!? Y-Your description is too inappropriate!"

"Ah, but I am the one feeling it, so your objection is overruled. By the way, can I have a real baby with you?"

"No! Please save your dream speech for when you are sleeping!"

Resolutely refusing Erica's request, Godou made a decision.

When someone precious was caught in a crisis, the [Youth] could be used to protect that person. But using that technique required engaging in certain activities...

Forbidden. He must seal the [Youth] and never use it ever again .

"Really, can't you continue to show me that manliness from just now?"

Erica was beginning to have fits like a spoiled child.

But given the vulnerable expression on her face as she rested on his thigh, she was so cute that it must be cheating.

If the two of them continued being isolated like that, how much longer could he endure? Who could have thought it was so difficult to ignore the cries of "just give in to temptation" in the depths of his heart?

Godou was going mad from unease and anxiety.

"—Godou-san, Erica-san!"

A familiar cute voice.

Lifting his head, he saw Mariya Yuri appear in her miko outfit.

Finally. The familiar face he missed. However, Godou felt rather embarrassed to be caught in such a posture in the middle of that kind of conversation!

"Yuri! You found us after all!"

Changing her pleading attitude, Erica went back to her usual cheerful voice, finally getting up from Godou's lap.

"Yes, yes. But what were you two doing in that kind of posture... Too shameless!"

Yuri scolded loudly.

Godou bowed his head in shame. It was just as she described, and he could not bear to face her in that kind of situation.

"What's the matter, it's been a while since I got some alone time with Godou. However... Fine, I did take advantage of the situation, so I will speak to Godou and let you have him next time. Does that work?"

Just as Erica responded to Yuri with a beautiful smile that was impossible to refuse, Godou's heart yelled out "That clearly won't work!"

"N-Next time for me... Erica-san, please do not say that. B-Because I... still have not prepared myself yet..."

Yuri spoke softly and was blushing as if she had a high fever.

She even stole a glance at Godou but quickly shifted her gaze away. What was going on? Godou felt troubled, for Yuri was acting a bit differently from before.

"M-Mariya what is going on with her..."

"I think she has accepted certain things, and made many preparations. Since she always had that intention, it's probably time for you to be prepared."

As Godou muttered, unable to grasp the situation, Erica whispered in response.

Prepare? Intention? What does it all mean?

"Did Lily send you over here? Who could have thought she even got the potion."

"Yes, thanks to the assistance of the History Compilation Committee, we finally reached this place. Liliana-san, who performed the ritual, actually wanted to come herself... But since it would be more convenient for me to travel to the Netherworld..."

"Yes, with powerful spirit vision, Yuri can easily obtain information from this world."

Seamlessly, the two of them transitioned the conversation to practical matters.

More convenient for Yuri to be here? Seeing Godou's incredulous expression, Erica immediately explained.

"You must have experienced it already. If you want information , you can obtain it through spirit vision. When Yuri came to this world, she immediately found us using spirit vision and easily used that image to fly here instantaneously. Am I correct?"

"Yes, but just to be safe, it is best to avoid using spirit vision here as much as possible."

Yuri surveyed the surroundings as she spoke with apprehension.

"Yes, compared to the real world, my power becomes stronger here. However... if any minor mistake is made, it could become dangerous—this is the kind of unpleasant feeling I am getting."

Godou recalled Ena who went too far with divine possession.

"If so, then the faster we get out the better. Actually, Seishuuin already returned to earth, and just like the way Mariya described, she has become abnormal. The power of Susanoo and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi has invaded her body, and we must save her."

"Eh!? Something went wrong when Ena performed divine possession in the Netherworld?"

After showing great surprise, Yuri became serious.

"If that is the case, then we cannot dally... Everyone, please come to my side."

Godou and Erica approached as Yuri directed.

As if praying far away to the other side, Yuri closed her eyes and was surrounded by blue light.

Was this the marker to bring them all back to earth?

As the thought crossed his mind, Godou's body was pulled up high into the air. The surface of the Netherworld he had been standing on became very distant almost instantly.

By the time he realized it, Godou and the rest were in the yard of a house he had never visited before.

They were back in their original world? Though he did not know how much time has passed, the sky was completely dark. The majestic Tokyo Imperial Palace could be seen not far away, so this must be the central part of the Chiyoda ward.

Within the premises of an ancient mansion, this must be the home of someone rich.

Suddenly, he noticed complicated and strange shapes and diagrams inscribed neatly on the ground as well as indecipherable letters and pictograms that seemed like a spell.

These were likely the remnants of magic. Godou looked around.

Beside him were Erica and Yuri who looked exhausted, while Liliana Kranjcar was also running towards him.

"Kusanagi Godou! You have returned safely!"

Fairy-like and silver-haired, the witch was especially emotional as she fought back tears.

Feeling apologetic for making her worry so much, Godou also noticed two other people.

The suited figure of Amakasu and a handsome fellow in a corner of the yard.

"Kusanagi-san, your safe return is more important than anything. Let me express my utmost joy at your homecoming."

"Amakasu-san! You came at the right time, do you know where is Seishuuin now!?"

In the same instant as he questioned the plain looking agent.

A chilling wind began to blow and strengthen, and it even started to rain.

—A storm was arriving. Godou clearly felt battle vigor awaken from within his body.

This was surely in reaction to something similar to a god nearby .

"This must be caused by Seishuuin Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi."

"Erica, you can tell?"

"Yes, probably because Godou gave me Verethragna's protection, I can feel it."

At some point in time, everyone's gaze had focused on Godou and Erica.

Yuri, Liliana, Amakasu, as well as the handsome character seen for the first time.

The last person was androgynous and possessed good looks that could very well belong to either a handsome youth or a beautiful girl. He or she smiled at Godou and nodded.

"I am Sayanomiya Kaoru, and Amakasu's boss, as well as a Hime-Miko like Yuri and Ena."

"Hime-Miko?"

"Many people have expressed surprise at that, but let's put it aside. Just now, did you say Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi are responsible for this? Could you explain the details of the situation to me?"

Someone clearly around the same age group, but turning out to be Amakasu's boss. Godou felt there was something problematic with Sayanomiya Kaoru's self-introduction. As he prepared to respond...

'—Save it, because the Campione has returned to this world.'

The voice identical to that troublesome girl.

But it was definitely not her normal tone of voice.

Seishuuin Ena's body stood with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi on the wall that surrounded the house.

The figure of Ena drenched in rain, gave a kind of hollow impression like some sort of puppet or a doll.

Was it because Yuri or Amakasu were being watched? Or did the divine blade have supernatural senses that discovered the Campione's return?

No matter what, the timing of her appearance was rather delicate.

Godou was determined. If this continued, so long as she continued to be possessed in this state, Ena's body would eventually collapse. She needed some sense beaten into her to wake up... But the question was how should she be beaten?

Verethragna's ten incarnations were all too powerful to be used against humans.

As Godou hesitated, Liliana stepped forward.

"Kusanagi Godou, please leave this to me. All we need to do is catch that woman, right? I cannot tolerate her rampaging around any further."

"Lily, she is currently not someone you can handle alone, I will join in too."

Naturally, the speaker was Erica.

Cuore di Leone and Il Maestro.

The two knights' respective magic swords appeared in their hands. Then their brightly colored bandiera capes were also summoned around their shoulders.

The cape striped red and black and the cape striped blue and black.

These were what the Templar Knights called the flags of army commanders and brave knights. On Godou's right stood Erica in red, while on the left was Liliana in blue.

In front of the red and blue knights, the Hime-Miko wielding the sword spoke without moving her lips.

'...Mere humans challenging me—the divine blade—and my miko? Rude fellows who do not know their place.'

This contempt came not from the miko, but from the divine blade.

However, its will to fight had been provoked, and Ena jumped down from the wall onto the road outside. Presumably, to find an open area, she began running towards the main road.

Even though she was controlled like a puppet, her motions were extraordinarily swift.

Erica and Liliana also pursued with speed akin to flying.

Godou also frantically ran after them. From the scenery he recognized, this was the area around Chidorigafuchi.[44]

At the cemetery entrance was an intersection, and opposite was a road for taking walks where trees were densely planted. Nearby was the Shuto Expressway as well as the palace moat of Chidorigafuchi, the stone walls surrounding the Imperial Palace, and many cherry blossom trees.

As Godou raced after them, a two on one battle was already unfolding along the green lanes of Chidorigafuchi.

On the hundreds of meters of walking lanes along the moat of the Imperial Palace, large numbers of cherry blossom trees were planted (primarily of the Yoshino cherry variety), turning into a beautiful sight every spring.

"What time is it now?"

"Almost one in the morning, though this usually has busy traffic , there are almost no pedestrians at this time."

To Godou's yelled question, Amakasu responded swiftly.

This young man easily caught up to Godou who was running at full strength.

(As a side note, Yuri was left behind long ago, while Kaoru showed no intention of following and only motioned for Amakasu to chase after them.)

During the last battle against Ena, who was controlled by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, Erica met with great defeat once.

Though it was now two against one, could they handle it? Using a Campione's authority will definitely kill Ena. Godou was caught in a dilemma as he worried about the outcome of the battle.

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? "[45]

"People, listen to David's song of mourning! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"[46]

The red and blue knights employed their trump cards from the very start.

Both were lyrics singing praises to unparalleled warriors—quotes from the songs of the heroic King David.

The strongest secret moves that could even damage a god. Erica did not use it in the Netherworld because she deemed it too dangerous to use spells which consumed too much magical power.

"But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of wild oxen!"[47]

Filled with despair, Erica's mournful wails resounded.

These were the "Golgotha Spells Words." Also known as the song of disaster, this was the hymn that Jesus Christ sang before he died while crucified at the site of Golgotha.

"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty!"[48]

Liliana's mournful requiem also reverberated in the surroundings.

This was the "Song of the Bow." A song of mourning that expressed the overwhelming pain and sorrow when the heroic King David grieved for his former master Saul and ally Jonathan.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."[49]

"O sword of Saul, the warrior's weapon fast as an eagle and strong as a lion. Descend into my hand now!"

The spell words of hate and despair were infused into Erica's magic sword.

The spell words of the ancient hero were infused into Liliana's magic sword.

The enemy, who forced them to use their strongest weapons to assure victory, also began to chant a song of magic in a robotic voice.

"Awesome beyond speech, O dread theme for my profane tongue..."[50]

Was the one chanting Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, or Ena?

From the fact that her lips moved, it was probably the latter. Before it could be fully discerned, the Hime-Miko's body moved like a puppet according to the rhythm of the song.

"That illustrious Sovereign, Our mighty Lord, Who reared his imperial palace / On the Makami plain of Asuka..."[51]

Erica used Cuore di Leone to block the horizontal slash of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

However, her whole body was sent flying.

She did not have the power to overcome the slashing attack.

Under similar circumstances in the Netherworld, her beloved sword had originally been cut into two. This time it withstood the attack, thanks to the infusion of the spell words of Golgotha.

"Now keeps his divine state, Sepulchered in stone. He it was who descended to dwell / At the pavilion of Wazami Field..."[52]

Having sent Erica flying, the divine blade next attacked Liliana.

The blue knight attempted to entangle Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi using Il Maestro, but was not successful, and like Erica, she too was blown away.

"In yonder province of the realm, Across the pass of high-forested Fuwa, there to rule the under-heaven -- To wield the scepter over his wide domain..."[53]

Ena moved her arms, legs and body with stiff movements like a puppet. Nevertheless, her divine sword still managed to swiftly send the knights into a deadly crisis.

Despite being two against one, the two realized they were outmatched if they fought separately and began to confer.

"Although I hate to do this, we must now cooperate. Attack or defend, which do you choose?"

"I will defend and Lily attack. If there is a chance, use the bow attack!"

"Is that okay? If it hits, that miko cannot stay unharmed."

"It can't be helped, since she is using that kind of power, but try to use sword attacks as much as possible!"

"Understood!"

The two knights leaned against each other tightly.

Entrusting one side of their bodies to each other, Erica on the left and Liliana on the right, began to advance at the same speed.

Though they moved just as fast as before, their attacks were no longer as loose or disparate.

When the divine sword came slicing, Erica blocked ingeniously but did not counterattack.

If one were to keep defending in a one on one battle, the opponent would easily follow up their attacks. Without stopping the enemy's advance, one would end up in a disadvantaged position, however—

In place of Erica who focused on defense, Liliana now concentrated on attacking.

Completely ignoring defense, she started a series of attacks with such ferocity and intimidation that even the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi could not counterattack as usual.

'...'

The divine sword and the miko did not say a word, but they clearly became more alert.

This was due to Erica and Liliana's formation, their distribution of offensive and defensive duties, their ever changing swapping of positions, and their brave simultaneous advance.

The Hime-Miko, who had held an overwhelming advantage against two opponents, was now being suppressed for the first time.

Godou was greatly surprised to see the red and blue knights cooperating brilliantly at a crucial moment.

"Erica! I will now prepare the bow and arrow, please endure."

"Got it!"

In order to protect her partner, Erica stepped forward. Behind her, Liliana put away her magic sword, and in replacement a longbow giving off blue light appeared in her left hand—the Bow of Jonathan!

Godou had once heard about it during the battle against Perseus.

"The Song of the Bow" was the spell to create the Sword of Saul and the Bow of Jonathan.

Like Erica's magic sword infused with the "Golgotha Spell Words", the former was a sharp blade that can even cut gods.

The latter could summon using the spell words a bow for shooting attacks.

The number of shots was limited by the amount of remaining magical power. After one or two misses, the precious trump card would be wasted. In the battle against Perseus, Godou saw her fire multiple arrows at once. This was an illusion used to confuse enemies to ensure the target was hit with certainty.

Summoning this trump card, Liliana was now seeking a decisive end to the battle!

—However the Hime-Miko saw through her intentions, and prepared to use her own trump card.

"Who summoned his Eastland host; And ordered our prince, Imperial son as he was, To pacify the furious men / And subjugate all the unruly lands."[54]

The spell song for vanquishing barbarians. Ena's body proceeded to raise Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi above her head.

Wind swirled and gathered.

From beneath Ena's feet, the violent wind blew like a vortex, forming a mini-tornado.

"Lily, hurry!"

"I know! O Bow of Jonathan, the warrior's weapon fast as an eagle and strong as a lion—!"

In Liliana's right hand appeared four arrows with blue light.

At that instant, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi slashed horizontally. Erica tried to block with Cuore di Leone but was deflected away.

Both Erica and Liliana's bodies were devoured by the tornado formed from under Ena's feet.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaah!?"

Along with their screams, the two knights were blown high up into the air by the tornado.

Thrown into the air and then mercilessly dropped onto the ground! Liliana's blue bow and arrows disappeared from her hands, and she seemed to have fainted.

"E-Erica-san, Liliana-san!"

"Things are not looking well, Kusanagi-san, what are you going to do?"

Arriving out of breath, Yuri saw this decisive scene, and her face instantly turned white.

Beside her was Amakasu questioning calmly. Godou ignored the two of them and ran towards Ena.

'—Finally, the god-slayer.'

Lips motionless, the Hime-Miko spoke softly with blank stares.

Godou was speechless; the opponent was definitely very strong.

However, even if Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was a divine sword, what it controls was still a human body whose strength was limited. A Campione's instincts allowed Godou to discern the true nature of the enemy.

Seishuuin Ena whose body was taken by the divine sword, possessed power that surpassed human magi.

Her current level was probably about the same as the dragon at Naples or the divine beasts sighted at Sardinia.

But compared to a [Heretic God], it was not a huge threat.

For example if the [Camel] was used, a simple victory was likely assured. However, Ena's body would be at risk if it had to withstand an attack from Godou's authority.

Emergency situations required emergency measures. Still...

"Godou, it's not your turn yet. Can you leave things to me?"

Someone was speaking to him.

The origin of the voice was Erica who was struggling to get up.

Summoning Cuore di Leone to her side, she used it as a crutch for support.

"If I fall down here and keep getting defeated by her, it would tarnish my reputation, Erica Blandelli's."

"Okay, you should just lie down and rest, you've reached your limits!"

"No—the battle has just begun... I was about to glamorously reverse the tides of battle in the second round? Do not get in my way...!"

Erica got up completely.

Though she was putting up a front, she did make an intense declaration that did not fit her usual style.

She gazed at Ena with burning pupils, the Hime-Miko responded with a puppet's gaze and expression.

Stop her? Or let her continue fighting? Of course she must be stopped.

There was no doubt. If she continued fighting, she would die. After concluding Erica had no hope of winning, she must be stopped no matter what—

...Wait a minute. Was there really no hope of winning?

The divine sword had sent Liliana flying and unconscious with just one strike.

Nevertheless, Erica withstood it. Since she had been consuming her magic and receiving attacks all this time, she should be weaker than Liliana. Could there be a power protecting her? —Of course!

As Godou realized this point, his eyes met with Erica.

His gaze moved down towards her lower abdomen.

Accompanying the expression of sudden realization, she placed her hand over her abdomen there. It looked like she had noticed as well.

"I forgot. My body currently has Godou's protection within it... I beseech the source of my magic, the seal of the [Copper Black Cross], grant unto me the knight's medal of honor!"

Carrying magical power, spell words were spoken out from her mouth.

At the same time, a change was produced.

Erica's red and black bandiera transformed into a long mantle-like coat, its lower hem reaching down to her knees. Fluttering intensely, its form was like a ferocious bird of prey with its wings spread out.

Then there was Cuore di Leone.

Originally a slender sword, the steel of the lion transformed into the form of a lance.

The steel barbs made it resemble a cavalry lance used by medieval knights of legend. Were its length shortened to about two meters or so, it would be a one-handed infantry lance.

Holding this lance in her right hand, she held an oval iron shield in her left.

The colors of bright red and jet black crisscrossed her fluttering battle garment. Equipped with a knight's lance and shield, Erica's heroic figure was that of a paladino crowned with a crest of the cross.

"Eh? Why does Erica-san have Godou-san's—Verethragna's power!?"

Yuri was very surprised and probably saw the reason of the change using spirit vision.

But Godou was equally surprised for he never expected the [Youth]'s protection to bring about such a change—victory was possible.

"Erica, is it possible? Can you defeat Seishuuin?"

"Of course! In my current state, I will not lose to that woman again!"

This promise heralded the beginning of the second round.

Despite clumsy footsteps, Ena charged forward with exceptional speed. Holding the divine sword with both hands, she slashed diagonally from the top right to the bottom left.

Erica used the oval shield to block.

The jet-black divine sword clashed intensely with the shield. Sparks flew from where they made contact, releasing intense divine power. They were evenly matched.

However, on Erica's side, she still had a lance in her other hand.

She thrust with all her might, but before the point reached its destination, Ena's body had jumped backwards like a locust.

Hence, Erica kicked at the ground.

Faced with Ena's retreat, she charged forward like a stallion.

A surge of continuous attacks like the onslaught of wrathful waves. Ena rolled along the ground, evading the dozens of attacks from the lance tip. In the process of rolling, she still managed to use her sword to slash at the calves of the pursuing Erica.

With outstanding reflexes, Erica evaded using small steps to the side.

Stopping Erica's wave of attacks, Ena quickly got up.

"How amazing, for her to fight evenly with Ena-san who is being controlled by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, it's the very image of a fierce demonic god."

Amakasu sounded very impressed.

Yuri and Liliana, who had regained consciousness, were also watching the battle with surprise.

"Kusanagi Godou... Is that the effect of the final [Youth] incarnation? What a terrifying power. Anyway, for Erica to have stolen first place, I really must complain."

Under Yuri's care, Liliana seemed a bit regretful.

The process of bestowing protection must definitely be kept secret. Godou swore to himself as he nodded lightly.

Then a surprising turn of events occurred, for Ena started laughing.

"Ha! Ha, hahahahaha! Too great, Erica-san, I am truly impressed, I never thought that you can be just as strong as me, who has absorbed divine power."

The cheerful soprano voice that had been absent for so long.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi has allowed Ena to speak, unlike the earlier clear cold tones.

This was the original voice of the lovely swordsman who casually enjoyed all the chaos being wrought. Godou wondered if it was because the state of divine possession had been released, but immediately knew he was wrong.

This was because the battle spirit infused in her, from Susanoo and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, had become even more heightened.

"Excellent, then let's have a true duel once again, starting now!"

Yelling out, Ena's jet-black divine blade flashed brightly.

With noisy scattering sparks, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi gave off blue-white lightning. Bearing the divine power of the conquering steel god and heavenly child of storms and king of Susa—Susanoo, its power was increasing.

Ena brandished the sword as easily as if it were her own limb, holding it tightly with both hands straight in front of her chest.

Up until now, she had been in a state completely dominated by divine power and spirit, without a shred of emotion.

However, through the joy and thrill of battle, Ena finally retrieved her emotions.

Then she entered a state of resonance with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi!

"Last time I defeated you with this move, so what will happen this time? Ama no Murakumo! Seize it!"

Ena pointed the blade at Erica, and it gave off a terrifying pulse that attacked the female knight.

Very clearly, it was an attack that absorbed magical power.

"Useless, your move won't work a second time!"

Erica grabbed the lower hem of her red and black coat and waved.

This blocked the pulse from the divine sword. The piece of fabric seemed to possess magical defensive ability almost equal to a Campione's.

Ena smirked unfazed, lifting the divine sword upwards.

As Erica defended her body with the shield, she aimed the lance at Ena. It was the stance of a frontal charge.

—A direct conclusion to the duel.

As Ena declared, both sides prepared for the end.

The two charged forward at the same time and collided violently.

As the divine sword swung down, the lance was thrust forward !

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi struck Erica on the shoulder, but the blade's point of contact was the part near the hilt.

Cuore di Leone pierced into Ena's body, but it was just a glancing blow to the left abdomen.

Neither blow was decisive.

Erica's charge was too rapid and thus did not get cut by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's sharpest part; with motions like a wild beast, Ena had narrowly evaded Erica's fatal attack at the last second.

However, this exchange had not ended.

It was true that the attack of the lance was evaded.

However, with the shield raised high, Erica charged with her entire body. This was the real frontal charge!

Ena's delicate body was blown away as if struck by a car collision.

"Hmm—!?"

"This is a knight's style... A frontal charge to break through the enemy's ranks. Do you feel it?"

To the fallen Ena, with irregular breathing, Erica declared victory.

However, the winning side also sank to her knees immediately.

Her bandiera and Cuore di Leone had returned to normal, and it looked like she too was at her limits.

"Yes, felt it... I surrender."

Ena tried to use Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as a crutch for support... but finally gave up.

Holding the divine blade, she was lying on the road. Though her body was immobile, her face showed a satisfied expression.

It resembled those youth movies during the Shouwa period, with the requisite performance at the end of a riverside duel. Godou shrugged his shoulders but suddenly noticed.

The storm, which appeared with Ena, had not subsided. In fact, it seemed to be getting stronger?

As the violent wind howled, massive raindrops bombarded Godou and the surface of the road.

"—Mariya!"

"Godou-san, it has not ended yet! Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi intends to continue fighting!"

In the instant he asked Yuri, he got the answer.

Godou rushed towards the divine sword, planning to snap it in half—but was a step too late.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi began to expand in size.

The roughly one-meter blade expanded nonstop and started to change its form.

...Very long. By visual estimates, it was roughly twenty meters or so.

The jet-black blade became a body, forming arms and legs. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had transformed into a giant.

A sword originally the weight of a woodcutter's tool, its blade now pointed up towards the heavens to form a vertical body.

Connected to two sides of its body were two blades—the arms, and around the approximate position of the elbows there were even joints for the arms to bend.

Then there were the legs, made of solid steel, thicker and heavier than even the body and the arms.

Compared to the length of the body, the legs were rather short, giving a somewhat unpleasant look. Overall, it gave off an extremely sharp feeling.

The giant of blades. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi has transformed into a giant of blades who could slice through everything with a simple swing. Ena's body was stuck inside a location corresponding to the shoulder.

"Your Majesty..."

From within Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, a quiet voice was heard.

"Seishuuin, are you ok? Can you escape from there!?"

"No—looks like not... I have no strength. Can Ena make a request?"

It was Ena's normal voice, this time she really seems to be released from divine possession.

"If you are asking to be saved, just wait a little, I am already thinking about how to save you."

"No, I don't want to bring you any more trouble..."

Ena responded to Godou in a philosophical tone.

As they conversed, the sword giant—Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi started moving on its short stubby legs, its direction of advance was towards Godou!

"Ama no Murakumo is still in high spirits for a battle with Your Majesty. Since that's the case, could Your Majesty please defeat it quickly with your power? It should be a simple task, right? Please do not mind Ena..."

"What do you mean, don't mind you!?"

"After all, everything is my fault... My own willfulness. But in the end, I did get to fight a very interesting and meaningful battle, so Ena has no regrets. Please do not mind and quickly defeat it. Farewell."

Towards the end, Ena's voice could no longer be heard.

In its place, was the approaching Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Though it had transformed into a giant of blades, its legs were very short and did not have any joints, so it was sliding along as if kneeling.

Godou looked around at everyone present.

Erica had already used up all her strength in the intense battle just now. The [Youth] protection has disappeared, and all her magic and stamina were consumed. Even so, she was still struggling to stand up to protect Godou.

Liliana, who had been knocked out earlier by Ena's attack, was trying to use her shaking body to summon Il Maestro and likewise planned to battle.

On the other hand, Yuri was watching with worried eyes the divine blade that had devoured Ena.

Then there was Amakasu calmly muttering things like "Ara ara, how troublesome." Though he spoke like that, it was clear that he did not have the power to defeat the berserk Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The first thing to do was to leave this place and keep everyone at a safe distance.

Deciding that, Godou began to run.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's legs were short and its mobility was terrible. No matter how gigantic it was, running away from it should be a simple task—but just as this thought entered Godou's mind...

Just as he was running past, the sword monster suddenly caught up with unexpected speed.

Due to an ominous feeling, Godou watched his back as he continued running. Thanks to that, he confirmed his suspicions as Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi sliced down with its right arm blade.

A sound of swish. This was a sound that could split apart air and even rain water.

If the blade had aimed forward another few tens of centimeters, Godou's body would have been sliced cleanly in half.

Such a sharp sword and its range of attack was so wide!

"No way, Your Majesty... Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi has no plans for mercy, so please destroy it quickly... Hurry, or else it will catch up to you!"

It was Ena's voice again, and it seemed like she has not lost consciousness. But there was no leisure to listen to her.

Godou stopped looking back.

Running full speed ahead, he definitely will not be caught.

Racing along Chidorigafuchi, the Imperial Palace could be seen opposite. Decorating along the palace moat were the conspicuous trees, the very well-known cherry blossoms.

Since he had increased the distance between them, Godou finally stopped running.

The blade monster transformed from Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was chasing along at a clumsy pace. To be honest, it was very slow and it would be easy to just keep running away, but that would only defer the problem without solving it.

"Kusanagi-san, only one solution remains. Didn't Ena say it already?"

Suddenly a man's voice came from beside him.

Turning to the source, Godou caught a fright. Amakasu was standing there without any signs of being out of breath.

"W-When did you follow along?"

"I've been chasing from behind all along. I can run pretty fast you know. Anyway, that thing there is more important, if we let that gigantic divine sword rampage, who knows how the situation will develop..."

Amakasu made a very reasonable complaint.

But Godou pointed out the detail he had ignored.

"Is it ok to let Seishuuin get caught in between? She is currently bound tightly to the sword!?"

"My opinion is that it can't be helped. As she said so herself, it is all her fault. In this kind of situation, even my boss, Sayanomiya Kaoru, will approve as the one responsible for the History Compilation Committee. Because there is no other way."

No other way... Was it really true? No, Godou did not agree.

He had not done what he should. Nothing had been attempted. In such a situation, concluding "no other way" would be too hasty!

"If so, I will say only this. No matter what, I will save Seishuuin first, then handle the monster later. How's that?"

"Oh, there's such a convenient plan? How are you going to do it ?"

"There's no plan yet! I'll just think it up as I go along! This is dangerous. You retreat first!"

Hearing Godou's answer, Amakasu showed an expression of surprise.

But there was no time to tend to Amakasu as Godou focused his attention on the approaching Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Once again, it swung down its right arm blade. The massive blade approached Godou's head. So fast! Despite its immense body size, its sword strikes were extraordinarily skilled.

However, it was precisely the reason *this* could be used. The incarnation that was unlocked when facing a high-speed attack.

Godou used the [Raptor].

Other than himself, everything in the world slowed down, and only Godou accelerated.

Calmly dodging the giant block of steel that was about to slice his head off, he then rushed onto the body of the blade using the massive increase in agility and jumping ability.

Easily running along the surface of the blade that was acting as an arm, he reached the shoulder location where Ena was buried.

The imprisoned Hime-Miko showed a relaxed expression that seemed to say, "My life has no regrets—"

What a worrying fellow, and yet she is acting so casual... A little shocked, Godou grabbed Ena's shoulder.

Pulling hard, though she seemed to be stuck tight, her body budged slightly.

Very good, now pull once again with full strength. Excellent, she is finally released.

Even at this moment, Ena still carried that spaced out expression. That was only natural considering Godou was still in a state of acceleration. Carrying the uniformed miko in his arms, Godou jumped off from the back of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

He originally wanted to attack it from behind.

Regrettably, the [Raptor] authority did not have the destructive power to defeat this thing, so Godou gave up the notion.

Looking ahead, he found Yuri running towards him.

Panting heavily, she stopped to catch her breath. To Godou in his accelerated state, Yuri looked completely motionless.

Erica and Liliana also came in pursuit.

Due to their injuries, even Yuri arrived faster than them. Godou set down Ena before them. Next, how should he take care of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi?

Though he had thought of a way, would it work as planned? Godou prepared to use the next incarnation.

The accelerated state ended and returned to normal.

"Mmm... no good after all. M-My chest—!"

Godou pressed his hand against his heart as he sank to his knees and collapsed forward.

Using the [Raptor] incarnation resulted in after effects of heart pain and a temporary state of immobility. His wishful thinking had been too naive.

"...G-Godou-san, why are you here!? Even Ena-san!?"

"Eh? I was clearly caught by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi? Why are Ena and Your Majesty here?"

The voices of the Hime-Miko pair were heard.

However, Godou had no time to pay attention to them. Simply enduring the pain was consuming all his strength.

Before he realized it, the Hime-Miko pair had held him in their arms and placed him in a sitting position.

"You used the [Raptor] incarnation, right? Which is how you rescued Ena-san..."

"Yes, that's right. I can destroy that sword if my condition improves slightly, but right now, it's impossible. You two should run away..."

Godou suggested as he nodded to the highly observant Yuri.

The pain in his heart was unbearable, but at the very least, he must make sure these two are saved—

Having lost him from its sights, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was turning left and right, searching for signs of Godou. In this situation, as long as they did not take him along, they should be able to escape successfully.

However, Ena spoke quietly beside him.

"No, Ena will not escape. Because for things to come to this, Ena is responsible, and Ama no Murakumo is Ena's partner... I will slow him down, you guys escape first."

"Idiot! Even if you risk your life, you won't be able to stall for long!"

Though it was true, the Hime-Miko of the Sword was not deterred.

Damn it, I put in so much effort to save you—as Godou gnashed his teeth, Yuri spoke decisively:

"Godou-san, you just need the ability to move temporarily, right ?"

Yuri asked with a stern expression.

That unrelenting beauty, made Godou and Ena withdraw their words of protest.

"Yes, yes, as long as I can concentrate for a while..."

Concentrating his spirit and power. Unless he did that, he would not be able to control that particular incarnation well. However, the pain in his chest was making him powerless. Yet he was so close to victory!

As Godou gnashed his teeth...

Yuri's face suddenly drew near. No, not only her face, even her lips were approaching.

Brief contact? Lips to lips?

By the time Godou realized what was going on, he was already being kissed by Yuri!

Magical power flowed along with her sweet breath, and the pain in his chest was relieved. Why?

"Yes, if you don't apply spells from within the body, it will not work on the Devil Kings. So that's what it meant!"

"Yes, that is correct. Just now I poured restoration magic in through the mouth..."

Shivering from embarrassment, Yuri conversed with Ena.

As Godou lay shocked, he silently watched Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

It seemed to have noticed his location, and was advancing in a sliding manner, about twenty meters away.

"Understood! Then Your Majesty, although Ena doesn't understand completely, I will also assist you. So you must win!"

"E-Ena!? Why, there is no need for you too..."

It came again, this time it was Seishuuin Ena who approached with her lips.

This was the third person he kissed today.

With the sound of "chuu~," the lips pressed together, gave off a sound like a light gust of wind.

His pain mostly subsided, but the extremities of his arms and legs were numb and his whole body felt powerless. The other side effect of the [Raptor] — the state of immobility had begun.

But there was still time to use *that*.

The power of the [Boar] incarnation—the ability to call forth the pitch-black gigantic beast from another world!

"May spines be crushed, may bones be broken, tendons torn; hair, brains, and blood mingled and trampled together with the earth. The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

After roaring with full strength, the entire pedestrian walking lane turned black.

The pitch-black [Boar] with its burly body, charged and ran out. The incarnation that could only be summoned to destroy a massive object, its target was now the gigantic Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The massive monster, whose body length measured twenty meters roughly, dwarfed the strange giant sword.

Chidorigafuchi had become the stage for the monster battle between the tall giant of blades and the [Boar].

The giant used its sharp and heavy blade to cut open the thick hide and muscles of the enormous jet-black beast, but it immediately realized that resistance was futile.

In terms of destructive power, their levels differed too much.

As the [Boar] bled blue-black blood, it roared joyfully, thrusting the tusks that did not lose to its opponent in sharpness, and using its entire body weight to charge, kick, and trample.

Finally, from its mouth came a roar mixed with supersonic waves.

Suffering these violent attacks, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was sent flying repeatedly.

"Who could have thought that the difference in level was so vast between a messenger of god and something controlled directly by a god or a Campione..."

Godou lightly exclaimed as he continued to lie motionless for the time being.

There was nothing he could do to escape from the battlefield or tear his gaze away from the horrific sight.

Chasing after Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi into Chidorigafuchi, the [Boar] leapt into the palace moat, turning it into a battle in water. The surrounding stone walls of the Imperial

Palace crumbled as it suffered the battering impacts of the monsters' bodies and the slashing attacks of the giant sword. It was now time for unrestrained destruction.

Chidorigafuchi's landscape was being destroyed completely by the current events.

Every time the giant beast and the giant sword clashed violently , massive sprays of water splashed about from the palace moat.

The moat itself was being demolished, scooped out, sliced open, and trampled by monstrous power.

The cherry blossom trees that brought joy to people every spring was being seriously vandalized. Snapped, crushed, pulverized... Tokyo's famous cherry blossom sighting spot was gradually disappearing.

"Amazing, Kusanagi-san. Who knew Your Majesty could be so powerful!"

Ena was watching Godou with glimmering eyes, while Yuri and Godou sighed deeply.

"Sorry, Mariya, it became like this again..."

"No, no, this was unavoidable... I will pay penance together with you."

"Ending up like this again, anyway, let's just say it was to be expected."

"Yes, even for something created by the gods to fight directly against a Campione, resulting in this dismal state was most natural . There can be no other outcome."

As destruction continued to be wrought, Erica and Liliana lightly exclaimed, having gathered together.

These two carried not the slightest sense of guilt in their tone of voice.

On the other hand, Amakasu had vanished at some point, probably to begin a cover-up operation for this incident.

And so, the culprits of this tragedy watched on, as the pitch-black [Boar] enjoyed its time destroying Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, trampling Chidorigafuchi, and letting loose roars of victory that resounded across the sky.

Epilogue

It was in the Boundary of Life and Immortality that was inhospitable to humans, the world where the soul was far more important than the body.

There, three elders were having a discussion.

Their location was a pavilion in a beautiful garden.

Though there were no servants, the place was kept very clean and tidy.

However, this was not something incredible, for the Boundary of Life and Immortality was composed of many different spaces.

In this broad realm, environments will change itself according to the preferences of the master.

The fact that the old god Susanoo lived deep in the mountains under violent storms was simply his preference.

"So, it's time to rate that Rakshasa King, right? You wanted to see how that person would treat those girls... which is why this commotion happened, right?"

The first one to speak was the great monk in black.

A living Buddha was one who has freed himself from the restraints of the body at the end of a life of asceticism, thereby approaching immortality.

"Those who I consider good men usually turn out to be excellent monarchs. When the sleeping child awakens, he will surely become the guardian of the earth."

The one who spoke was the glass princess.

The fair princess possessing pupils the color of glass and unparalleled beauty, her age actually far surpassed the great monk's.

As a side note, this elegant garden was her dominion.

"Princess, I believe your conclusion is too early. I find him too rash. Take this incident for example, there were actually many easier ways to solve the matter."

"Insignificant matters like this can always be solved in time."

The princess disagreed openly with the great monk's objection.

"Enlightened Master, did you forget? That person would help women even at the cost of hardship to himself. In every action, from the way Kusanagi-sama treated the girls, I can see that he is someone who can be trusted with important matters."

"Yes, then Old One, what do you think?"

"From the tricky way he stole my sword, this brat cannot be underestimated."

The elderly god was the oldest present and spoke in tones as if he was uninvolved.

"Though I was planning on sending the miko to him as a gift, I never said I would give up the sword as well. Yes, he is impulsive, but I appreciate his qualities. Anyway, there is no need to make a decision immediately."

"That is to say—keep observing?"

Susanoo nodded generously to the princess's question.

"Yes, it is still uncertain whether the troublesome brat will wake up. Kusanagi's talents, let me savor them slowly."

"So in the end, all the rights and privileges to Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi has fallen to Kusanagi-san... Is that okay?"

It was at the Sayanomiya residence at Sanbanchou of the Chiyoda special ward.

Sayanomiya Kaoru sat on the rocking chair in the study, murmuring to herself as she rocked.

"Ena-san seems to think so, but it hasn't been confirmed yet. After that commotion, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi still harbors great divine power, but the previous user Ena-san can no longer use it. Neither can she send it back to the original owner—the Old One. So that is the situation now."

The one who answered was Amakasu Touma.

The master and subordinate looked at the sword in its sheath lying on Kaoru's office desk.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Though this sword contained the deity of the conquering god, it was also a subordinate god to Susanoo.

"Due to Ena's divine possession losing control, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi gained the status of an independent god, so Kusanagi-san who defeated it has usurped the god's authority... That could be what happened, maybe."

Kaoru spoke as she gazed at the shattered divine blade.

"It could very well be his second authority. 'I will become the companion of one who is stronger than me.' It's such a shounen manga development."

"Its appearance has been restored, but its internals are still broken, right?"

"It's embarrassing, but yes, it was destroyed quite thoroughly."

No matter what, a continued discussion was not going to yield the truth.

Towards the competent but not necessarily loyal subordinate, Kaoru ordered with frivolous tones:

"In any case this is something dangerous and cannot be returned to Ena's possession. It is decided that it will be kept in the storeroom of this house. By the way, giving it to the temporary owner should be another option."

"I have also tried asking, but he refused because he did not want to break the firearms and weapons regulations."

"Kusanagi-san... has common sense in a surprising area, what a strange person."

"He definitely wouldn't want to be described like that."

Liliana Kranjcar was puzzled.

In front of her, Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri were casually having lunch. However, she felt that they had become even more intimate... Was this her imagination?

After the commotion caused by Seishuuin Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, a few days have passed and it was the following week, lunchtime on a certain school day.

As always, they were having lunch on the roof.

As usual, Liliana prepared lunch for Kusanagi Godou.

Today's menu was authentic Spanish seafood paella, as well as fruit, cheese, cucumber pickles, etc... However, beside it were two black wooden lunchboxes.

One contained salmon rice, with three green leaves scattered on top, providing a nice contrast of color for the food.

The other lunchbox was filled with side dishes. Kyoto roasted fish, spicy tofu, meatballs, a dish made of lappa and konjac, as well as various homemade pickles...

Not only did they taste delicious, but they also looked great. Simply the sight of the food's beautiful appearance was a pleasurable experience.

Liliana looked at the lunch she prepared in a simple container, and could not help feeling uneasy. Though in taste she definitely did not lose to Yuri, perhaps she was greatly surpassed in terms of visual impact.

The one who brought these wooden lunchboxes was the Hime-Miko, Mariya Yuri.

"Mariya sure can cook well."

Godou praised as he tasted the various offerings, separated out onto paper plates.

"If this was taken to grandfather, it will definitely pass. That guy's mouth is extremely picky, especially towards Japanese cuisine. But this taste is definitely good enough."

"Uh, thanks. But even if it passes for grandfather, how about Godou-san...?"

Being praised, Yuri asked with apprehension.

Probably because she was so concerned with Godou's response and opinion, her expression did not have any confidence.

"Umm, could it be that it does not suit your tastes?"

"No no, how could that be possible, your cooking is very delicious."

"Is that so? Then I am relieved... However, if you dislike anything, you must be honest, I will remember it."

"Don't say that. This kind of luxurious lunch, no matter how it's made it will be very delicious."

Reassured and smiling once again, Yuri was acting towards Godou in a natural manner without any stiffness.

Liliana was certain. These two people could not have behaved so naturally before. They used to be polite but distant, and now it was all gone...!

"Godou-san, if you have something that you like, do you want me to get it for you with chopsticks?"

"Yes, but this kind of little thing I can do myself, no need to trouble yourself."

"But I am closer to the lunchbox... It will be easier for me."

Holding the paper plate and the serving chopsticks, Yuri asked. Though Godou had refused, he immediately changed his tune to " you are right" and made two or three requests afterwards.

Hearing these exchanges, Liliana's heart was filled with anxiety.

Recently when she made the same requests, Godou would always refuse her resolutely with "no need, it's fine!"

If she tried to take care of him or serve him like before, Godou would run away, very wary of how others viewed him.

Saying something like losing a man's dignity, I'm not a leecher on women, etc... All these puzzling speeches.

However, why could Mariya Yuri—!

"Liliana-san, is there anything you would like? Please take anything that suits your fancy."

"Uh, no problem, please do not mind me."

Liliana frantically played dumb.

Yuri was like a well-mannered high-class lady, full of benevolent smiles.

She was nowhere as reserved as before, what was the reason for this change?

"As different as the north wind and the sun, so goes the saying."

Sitting on the side, Erica Blandelli murmured to herself.

Appearing without a lunch again, she gave herself good reason to plunder Yuri and Liliana's lunchboxes.

"Yuri's strengths match very well with Godou's value system. Once their relationship passed a certain point, it was only natural to expect this kind of situation. Even if she ran into some difficulties lately, their relationship already showed these hints before that."

The [Diavolo Rosso] explained as if she saw through everything .

"E-Erica, what on earth is going on?"

"Exactly as you see, Godou is completely unwary of her, and Yuri can act naturally beside him and apply herself towards what a 'woman' can do. This is something that neither I nor Lily can manage."

"Are you saying that my master is wary of me!? What an insult!"

Liliana was protesting with a voice that only Erica could hear.

However, Erica sneered with pity, and Liliana could not help feeling terrified.

"Lily, this war cannot be won with desire and instinct alone. Of course, if you are satisfied with being just a 'convenient woman,' then that's another matter."

"W-what are you saying!?"

I know him better than you do.

Implying that and bragging to herself, Erica's expression was especially contemptible. However, Liliana did agree that the situation was not good. Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri getting along so well was a huge problem.

As the knight guarding over him, how could she get in between them?

Wait a minute, come to think of it, she just negotiated with Sayanomiya Kaoru, and agreed to ally with them. As it stands, she could only stand aside and watch things develop...

Liliana agonized in depression, when suddenly Kusanagi Shizuka's voice was heard.

"Really! Onii-chan and Mariya-senpai have been flaunting their affection all this time! And getting increasingly intimate! This has to stop! You look like fools, how unsightly!"

She complained with great agitation.

With an unfazed expression, Godou and Yuri simply looked at Shizuka, their sister and junior respectively.

"What affection... Aren't we just eating lunch normally?"

"Yes, Shizuka-san, stop saying strange things. Quiet down and have lunch."

Being criticized instead, Shizuka's shoulders trembled with rage .

"Hmm... Your attitudes sure are unified, and you dare say you are not affectionate? What is going on, you're like a couple who have been married for years, totally shameless!"

"What married couple, you idiot, don't make jokes like that."

"Yes, calling us a married couple... Actually, not yet..."

The two denied as they looked at each other, and shyly bowed their heads at the same time.

As Liliana endured the shock of watching their interactions, a new girl appeared on the roof.

Casting everything aside, Liliana and Erica exchanged glances, for the intruder was Seishuuin Ena.

"Ena-san! Your body has recovered?"

"Yes, well enough. Sorry to everyone, I've brought all of you trouble this time."

The Yamato Nadeshiko style Hime-Miko responded as she approached the group.

It felt a little strange to see Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi absent from her shoulder.

Reportedly, the recent frequent storms were all because of her. Apparently, storms were summoned by divine power after communicating with Susanoo in the Netherworld.

Who could have expected the trouble-making woman to show up! Liliana could not help glaring at Ena.

"In order to reflect on this incident, Ena will temporarily return home to be educated. So before I leave, I just wanted to greet you all..."

Hearing Ena's words, Shizuka showed a questioning expression that seemed to say, "What is this about?"

Reluctant to explain to his sister, Godou swiftly said, "Don’t mind it."

"Though all sorts of major... well, not too major things happened, I don't think we really mind. The next time we meet, I hope we can get along better."

Godou changed his words midway because he recalled but hoped to downplay the tragedy of Chidorigafuchi.

Though Godou was the world renowned Campione, he was still delicate in certain areas.

"Yes, it is for sure. Ena will get along with you all in the future, it's a promise!"

"Yes, much appreciated. Erica, is it okay? I have already made peace with her."

"Sure, since Godou has already spoken, I will turn a blind eye and forget your mistakes."

Erica shrugged.

If that's the case, Ena's farewell greeting should be coming to a close, but just as Godou thought that, Ena's expression suddenly became seductive.

"...So, from today onwards, it's fine if Ena becomes one of Kusanagi-san's 'women,' right?"

"M-My what!?"

"Onii-chan! This person has said something unbelievable, what is going on again!?"

Shizuka yelled out while Erica, Yuri, and Liliana silently watched the two, deep in their own thoughts. Godou simply felt troubled.

"Actually, that was the whole reason why Ena came in the first place. Since Kusanagi-san risked his life to save me, and caused Ena to fall in love with you. Also, Kusanagi-san has obtained the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, right? That is Ena's partner, so why don't you accept it along with me!"

"N-no, besides how come I didn't know that I have gained something so dangerous!"

"But that is the truth... Ena is still a little afraid of doing erotic things, but kissing is completely fine. Do you want to have another go? Right now?"

"K-Kissing, what is that all about?! Onii-chan, what is going on!"

As Ena approached and Shizuka questioned, Godou looked towards the other three as if pleading for help.

Great, this was now the time to win his trust.

Liliana coughed, and began to speak calmly.

"Kusanagi Godou, it looks like you are trying to act coldly towards this girl who wants to enter your harem. This is not like you. You should accept her with the usual attitude, as befits a king's dignity. As for little sister Shizuka, I will explain to her later. Please leave it to me!"

Though it was not something she wished willingly, now was the time to let him witness the acceptance in her generous yet sorrowful heart.

But her master held his head in his arms instead.

"Liliana, do not make things worse with those kinds of words!"

"Godou, that woman is no good. Though I can forget the suffering she brought me, I cannot agree to let her serve by Godou's side!"

"That is correct. Ena you have to watch your words and actions. Do not make things hard for Godou-san!"

True autumn was rapidly approaching, but the chaos and commotion surrounding Kusanagi Godou probably would not subside for the time being.

Afterword

It's been a while, everyone.

This work has finally reached the fifth volume. For this series to have continued so far, it was all thanks to everyone's support. Here I express my utmost gratitude to you all.

So in this volume, the second meeting of some kind of judgment council was held.

Actually, the contents of the first judgment council meeting has already been published.

In the official website of Shueisha's Super Dash Bunko, there are specials for many of the works under their banner. The "Campione !" special is also quietly being released.

Those who haven't read them, should check it out some time.

By the way, about those little booklets given out for free in public events which contain unpublished series or short stories. The one who makes these booklets is H-san who works at the editorial department of Super Dash Bunko. With sorrowful eyes, he has complained to me saying "those take a lot of work" as he made those masterpieces.

People who have received these booklets, please be mindful of H-san's efforts, and don't throw them away.

Actually, I have many ideas locked away in my mind that probably have no direct effect on sales.

Though some of them have been published as short stories, but it is just the beginning.

For example, there is the short story 'The Night of Milan Where Only Men Watched "Magical Girl Sorami,"' or 'RPG Stats of All Major Characters, the Highest Abilities Turn Out to be That Unexpected Person,' or 'An Abilities Chart Like an SLG, the Numbers are so Expected, Too Boring,' as well as 'Living Legends of Campione.'

...Though it sounds like bragging to be coming from me, but these are all treasure troves of ideas that do not help sales.

Perhaps these may one day be released on the internet or through other forms. However, to this date there hasn't even been a blog or website under the name of Takedzuki Jou.

No, I am a novelist after all, perhaps it would be a good idea to do a blog?

But then again, right... Even before beginning, I felt it was troublesome to update... No no, it's the pressure of having to provide fresh material to everyone regularly, that has given me pause against taking the first step.

If readers are willing to do anything to see these ideas, you can try imitating our friends at the '15x24' commemoration panel event who attacked Shinjou-san and chief editor Marutakara, and relay to the editorial department of Super Dash Bunko your precious opinion...

Also, '15x24' is very interesting, would it be possible for me to get a first glimpse at the already written Volume 6? No? I see...

Back to the topic at hand, Volume 5 was the prologue of the ' School Saga,' though the developments were kind of mediocre.

Though certain parts were censored, but what I mean by mediocre is just compared to the average level of the series in general.

A reaction to this may appear in the next volume.

Most likely it will be the named characters so far, caught in a chaotic battle with this god or that god.

If the opportunity arises, let us meet again in the intense battles of Volume 6.

Takedzuki Jou, October 2009

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Aoyama Doori:** Main street in Aoyama, Tokyo.
2. ↑ **Miko**: Miko are usually Japanese shrine maidens. However, in this story the term also refers to a type of magic-user, and not all of those magical miko are shrine-maidens. That is why we left the term as miko whenever it shows up.
3. ↑ **Hime-Miko**: Japanese for princess-shrine maiden. It is the name of a group of people and as with miko, we decided to leave it as it is for now.
4. ↑ **Swastika [卍]**: do not associate with Nazism; see Eastern Swastika Use (Wiki)
5. ↑ **Yushima Tenjin**: Shinto shrine in Tokyo devoted to Tenjin, a god related to learning. It is frequently visited by the students hoping to pass the entrance exam
6. ↑ **Kanda Myoujin**: Famous Tokyo shrine devoted to two of the fortune gods (Daikokuten & Ebisu), as well as Taira no Masakado, a Heian-era rebel samurai later elevated to an immensely popular god
7. ↑ **Seiza**: Japanese term for the traditional formal way of sitting in Japan
8. ↑ 1 **shaku**=30.3cm, 1 **sun**=3.03 cm, 1 **bu**=3.03 mm
9. ↑ **Laissez-faire**: Principle of minimum interference from a higher power, e.g. from the government in economics: Laissez-faire
10. ↑ **Yakisoba bread**: Japanese hot dog with fried noodles in the bread
11. ↑ **Nezu**: Nezu is part of the "Ya-Ne-Sen" neighorhood where early 20th century culture still lingers. The name "Ya-Ne-Sen"

comes from the first letters of the 3 neighborhoods Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi. A popular area among foreign visitors to enjoy the traditional Japanese atmosphere full of local color.

12. ↑ **Hakama**: type of traditional Japanese clothing; see [1]
13. ↑ **Yushima**: a neighborhood in Bunkyo Ward, Central Tokyo .
14. ↑ **Kurumaebashi Street**: An important street in Tokyo, leading from the Bunkyo Ward to National Highway 14.
15. ↑ **Kantou**: geographical region of Japan that centers around the Tokyo metropolitan area.
16. ↑ **Oinari**: also Inari Ookami, a deity (sometimes depicts as three or five deities) of fertility, rice, agriculture, foxes, and industry; with pure white kitsune foxes serving as messengers, inari often appears in popular Japanese culture (and thus anime) as a fox spirit.
17. ↑ **Yamato Takeru no Mikoto**: a legendary prince of the Yamato Dynasty; his father Emperor Keiko feared his brutal temperament and sent him on numerous campaigns, hoping for his death. But his aunt, a miko of Amaterasu (Japanese sun god), lent him the Sword of Kusanagi (also named Ama no Murakumo, Ena's sword here) to assist him; nevertheless, he died tragically of an illness after blaspheming one of the local gods.
18. ↑ **Oto Tachibana no Hime**: consort to the prince, who sacrificed herself to pacify the spirits of the sea during Emperor Keiko's campaign to take Kazusa province.
19. ↑ **National Isolation**: since 1630s and prior to 1854 when Commodore Perry forcibly opened Japan's doors, Japan had

a foreign policy of 'Sakoku' (Locked Country) where no foreigner may enter and no Japanese may leave, under penalty of death.

20. ↑ **Toranomon**: literally Tiger's Gate, Toranomon is a business district in central Tokyo.
21. ↑ **Mithuna**: Mithuna is the tantric term for the union of lovers[2]. The reliefs it refers to here are probably the ones outside the Lakshman temple in the Khajuraho Group of Monuments[3]
22. ↑ **Sneak over at night... illegal these days**: Yuri is referring to the Japanese practice of Yobai[4], where young men would silently crawl into a sleeping woman's room and sleep with her if she consented. In many cases, this was done by a guy both the family/girl knows, and sometimes even with the consent of the girl's parents. There were similar practices in pre-modern Europe often referred as 'climbing the window,' usually done by lovers or officially engaged pairs whom could not get married yet due to special circumstances (e.g. guy was still an apprentice).
23. ↑ **Where Lily Flowers Bloom**: As you may guess, it's a Yuri reference (the Japanese terminology for *Girl's Love*/Shoujo-ai, not the character), as yuri (百) literally means lily.
24. ↑ **Izumo**: refer to the legend of the Japanese storm god Susanoo and the slaying of the Yamata no Orochi.
25. ↑ **Shubo**(坪): the shubo is a size unit used for rooms or buildings in Korea, Japan, China and Taiwan equal to 400⁄121 square meters (3.3058 m^2). In this case, the tearoom is six shubo in size.
26. ↑ **Seiza**(正): literally "proper sitting," the Japanese term for the traditional formal way of sitting in Japan, first kneeling

on the floor, folding their legs underneath their thighs, while resting their bottom on the heels.

27. ↑ **Koseki**(戸): the Japanese family registry. Japanese law requires all households to report births, acknowledgements of paternity, adoptions, disruptions of adoptions, deaths, marriages and divorces of Japanese citizens to their local authority.
28. ↑ **Rounin**(浪): rounin was a term for a masterless samurai during Japan's feudal period. According to the samurai code (bushido), a samurai was obliged to commit suicide on the loss of their lord, and was meant to suffer great shame if they chose not to honor the code. Since these former samurai could not legally take up new professions, they sought to make a living with their swords. Some worked as mercenaries or bodyguards while others turned to crime. The criminals of the Edo period gave the rounin a persisting image of thugs, cutthroats and vagrants.
29. ↑ **Okonomiyaki**: a Japanese savory fried pancake that contains a variety of ingredients.
30. ↑ **Teppanyaki**: a style of Japanese cuisine where food is cooked on a flat iron plate (teppan means iron plate).
31. ↑ **Monjayaki**: a specialty of the Kantou region, it is similar to okonomiyaki except the dough is more liquid.
32. ↑ **Mandala**: a Sanskrit word meaning "circle," refers to circular concentric diagrams with spiritual and ritual significance in both Buddhism and Hinduism.
33. ↑ **Kannushi**(神): the person responsible for the maintenance of a Shinto shrine as well as for leading worship.[5]
34. ↑ **Kojiki**(古): dating from the early 8th century, the "Record of Ancient Matters" is the oldest surviving chronicle in Japan

and is a collection of myths concerning the origin of the four home islands of Japan. The lyrics quoted by Ena comes from Volume II of the Kojiki.

35. ↑ **Man'youshuu**(万): the "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves " is the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry. The second half of Ena's incantation comes from poem #406 in the Man'youshuu.
36. ↑ **Ezo**(蝦): the name of a native tribe in Japan that was eventually driven by the government to Hokkaido and the northern part of Honshu. Scholars are divided on whether the Ezo are the same as the Ainu.
37. ↑ **Man'youshuu**: the "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"(万) is the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry. Ena's incantation here comes from poem #2663 in the Man'youshuu.
38. ↑ **Rakshasa**: a race of mythological humanoid beings or unrighteous spirits in Hinduism and Buddhism, also called man-eaters.[6]
39. ↑ **Juunihitoe**(十): literally "twelve-layer robe", the juunihitoe is an extremely elegant and highly complex kimono that was worn only by court-ladies in Japan.[7]
40. ↑ **Dantian**(丹): located below the navel (about three finger widths down and two finger widths deep), a point associated with cultivating life energy (qi) and vital essence.
41. ↑ **Banchou Sarayashiki**(番): literally "Dish Mansion at Banchou," a famous Japanese ghost story of love separated by social class, broken trust and broken promises, leading to a dismal fate.[8]
42. ↑ **Jikisan hatamoto**(直): warriors granted the privilege of reporting directly to the shogun.[9]

43. ↑ **Daimyo**(大): a generic term referring to the powerful territorial lords in pre-modern Japan who ruled most of the country from their vast, hereditary land holdings.[10]
44. ↑ **Chidorigafuchi**(千): a park at the northwestern section of the moat surrounding the Imperial Palace. Known for its cherry blossoms, it is home to the little known Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery for unidentified soldiers who died in World War II.
45. ↑ **Word of Abandonment**: quoted by Jesus from Psalm 22, it is the only saying that appears in more than one gospel (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).
46. ↑ 2 Samuel 1:27
47. ↑ Psalm 22:19-21
48. ↑ 2 Samuel 1:22
49. ↑ Psalm 22:22
50. ↑ Poem #199 of the Man'youshuu.
51. ↑ Poem #199 of the Man'youshuu.
52. ↑ Poem #199 of the Man'youshuu.
53. ↑ Poem #199 of the Man'youshuu.
54. ↑ Poem #199 of the Man'youshuu.